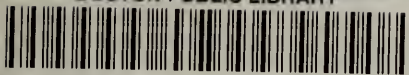


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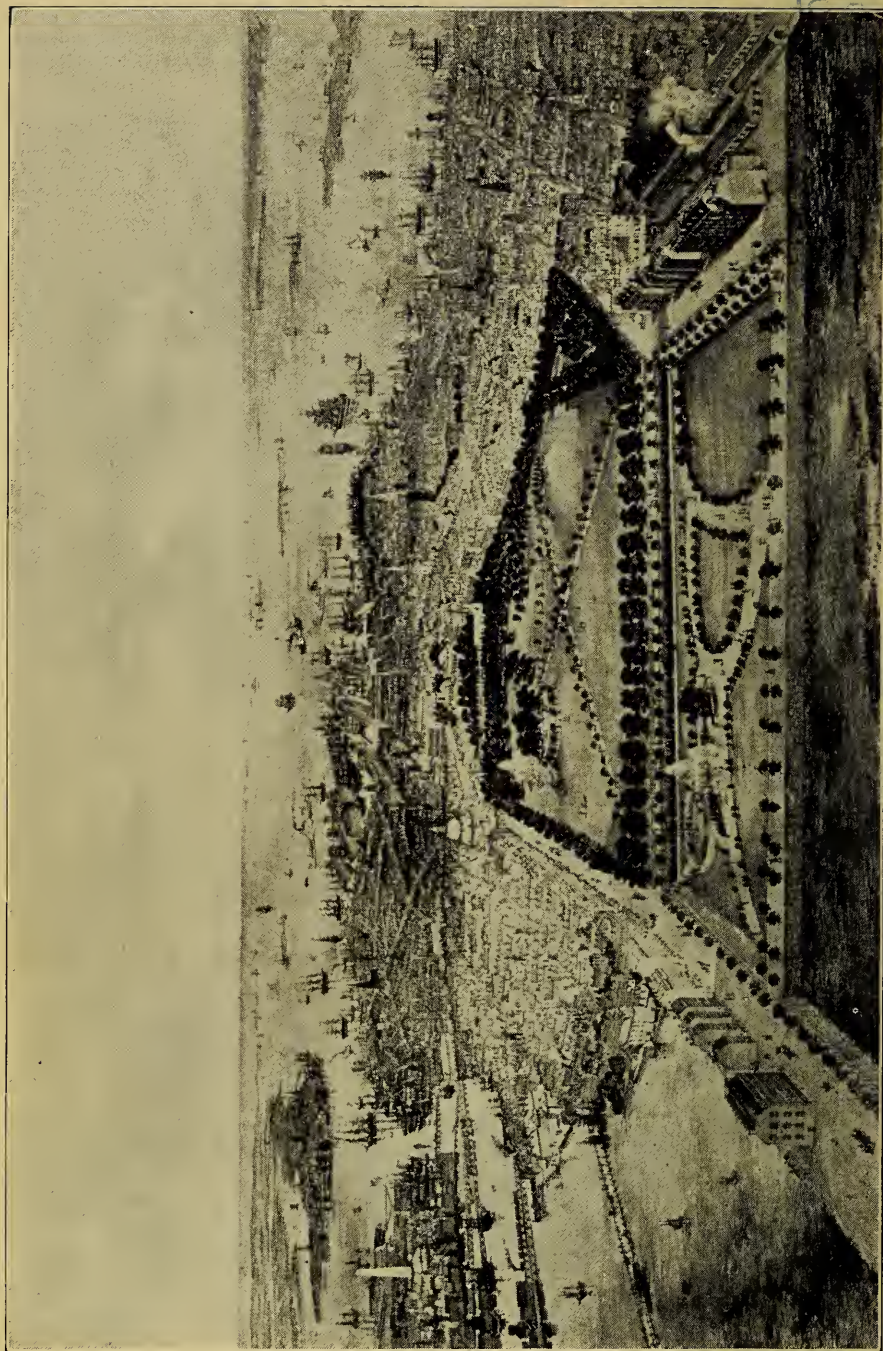


**BOSTON COMMON**  
**SCENES FROM FOUR CENTURIES**









BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF BOSTON, 1850



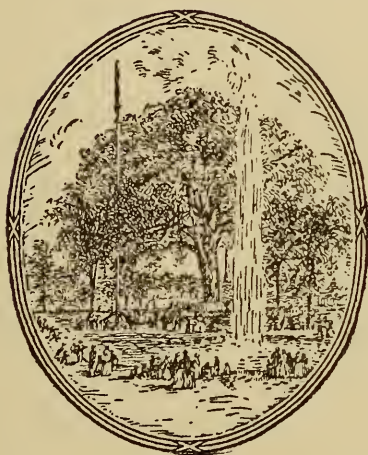


# BOSTON COMMON

## *Scenes from Four Centuries*

BY

M. A. DEWOLFE HOWE



BOSTON AND NEW YORK

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

The Riverside Press Cambridge

1921

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## PREFACE

**I**N 1910 an edition of five hundred and fifty copies of this book, lacking what are now its final pages, was issued from The Riverside Press. The author can ascribe the instant sale of these copies only to the beautiful form in which the book appeared. But of any author it must be said that he is wont to crave a wider audience than that of bibliophiles, and takes no special comfort in hearing that copies of his book have been picked up by collectors at twice the original cost. In the present instance he has suggested to his publishers on several occasions that the time for a simpler edition of the book, accessible to the larger company of readers, had come. For various reasons, probably valid, they have never shared this view until this moment. Now that they have done so, the author realizes that at no earlier date could the story of Boston Common have been brought to so appropriate a conclusion as that which permits a retrospect of those recent war-time years through which it served a great and memorable purpose.

M. A. DEW. H.

BOSTON, *June*, 1921





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The title-page vignette is from a drawing by Hammatt Billings engraved for the title-page of Sprague's Writings, Boston, 1850. It shows the Old Elm and the Frog Pond fountain.





# BOSTON COMMON

## THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

**I**F we look for accurate topographical description in the pages of poetry, and find it, we are inclined to think either that the description is faulty or that the poet holds his title by a doubtful tenure. But the most definitely Bostonian poet has written about the most intimately Bostonian tract of land with a precision which gives his lines a value positively historical. Making all allowances for the fact that Dr. Holmes's description of Boston Common in 1630 is a poetical description, and therefore in some measure imaginative, it opens one's eyes to the essential aspect of the Common at the very beginning of things, so far as white men are concerned, on what the ancient town records called "this Neck of Land of Boston"; and it may well stand at the forefront of any attempt to recall the scenes with which the Common has been associated: —

1630

All overgrown with bush and fern,  
And straggling clumps of tangled trees,  
With trunks that lean and boughs that turn,  
Bent eastward by the mastering breeze, —  
With spongy bogs that drip and fill  
A yellow pond with muddy rain,  
Beneath the shaggy southern hill  
Lies wet and low the Shawmut plain.

*Boston Common*

And hark! the trodden branches crack;  
A crow flaps off with startled scream;  
A straying woodchuck canters back;  
A bittern rises from the stream;  
Leaps from his lair a frightened deer;  
An otter plunges in the pool; —  
Here comes old Shawmut's pioneer,  
The parson on his brindled bull.

The eastward-bending trees represent the observation of no mere visitor, misled by the Boston east winds and their reputation, but the experience of one who has himself weathered the northwesterly gales beating upon the Common directly from the water that long bordered its outer slope. If the seasoned inhabitant appears in this allusion, the local antiquary stamps himself upon the reference to

old Shawmut's pioneer,  
The parson on his brindled bull.

It is a picturesque tradition that the sole settler of the Boston promontory, found upon it when Winthrop and his followers arrived in 1630, used to ride about the place on the back of one of his cattle. Some of the streets in Boston are reputed to have been laid out by the cows, and who shall say that the present paths in the Common may not have been traced originally by the Reverend William Blaxton's (or Blackstone's) bull? Certain it is that this English clergyman showed hospitable instincts at the first. He it was who went to Winthrop in Charlestown, where the first colonists were suffering from lack of good water, and advised their moving across to the peninsula of Shawmut, abounding in excellent springs. They came, and four years later, in 1634, Blaxton, who had fled

from home to escape the lord-bishops, felt that he must flee still farther into the wilderness from the "lord-brethren." But before going he sold to the town the piece of land which had been set aside for his perpetual possession, reserving only a lot of about six acres, the boundaries of which have long been obliterated by the houses between Beacon and Pinckney Streets in one direction and Spruce Street and the water-margin near Charles Street in the other. The land which the town acquired ran eastward somewhat beyond the present line of Park Street, extended on the southerly side to what is now Mason Street, and in the direction of Park Square of modern times did not reach quite so far as at present. But it was virtually the Common of forty-eight and two fifths acres which has come down to us, with minor changes of outline and extent.

To pay for it the town raised the sum of thirty pounds, by a tax of six shillings and upwards levied on every householder. This inexpensive acquisition was rendered thrice secure to the colonists as a body, by the royal grant of all the land on which they settled, and by deeds of purchase and of confirmation from Indian sachems whose rights to it were thus superseded. We learn from the deposition of four aged men in 1684, describing the purchase from Blaxton, that thereupon "the Town laid out a place for a trayning field; which ever since and now is used for that purpose & for the feeding of Cattell." There was at first some talk about dividing this land amongst the inhabitants, but the town records for March 30, 1640, contain this entry: "Also agreed upon that henceforth there shalbe noe land granted eyther for hous-plott or garden to any person out of the open ground or Comon Feild Which is left betweene the

Centry Hill & Mr. Colbrons end; Except 3 or 4 Lotts to make up the streete from bro. Robte. Walkers to the Round Marsh.”<sup>1</sup> What the people had acquired they proposed to hold sacred to the purposes of the community.

The references to the Common in the town records of the early years have much to do with its use as a pasture. It is ordered, for example, “that there shalbe kept on the Common bye the Inhabitants of the Towne but 70 milch kine; . . . that ther shalbe no dry cattell, yonge Cattell, or horse shalbe free to goe on the Common this year [1646]; but on horse for Elder Oliver; . . . that if any desire to kep sheep, hee may kep foure sheep in lieu of a Cow.” The right of commonage was restricted closely to “those who are admitted by the townesmen to be inhabitants.” None who came after 1646 could have the right of commonage, “unless he hier it of them that are Comoners.” A keeper of the cows pastured on the Common was named from time to time, receiving at first “two shillings a Cowe”; and, for the benefit of those who elected to keep sheep “in lieu” of a cow, a shepherd was subsequently appointed.

Carefully as the live stock was guarded, it appears that the Common required protection from those who made a random distribution of “intralls of beast or fowles or garbidg or Carion, or dead dogs or Catts or any other dead beast or stinkeing thing”; for in 1652 these offenders were “injoynened to bury all such things that soe they may prevent all annoyanc unto any.” It was bad enough to annoy “any”; to annoy the Common itself was more like annoying the chief magistrate or the Reverend John Cotton. Accordingly, five

<sup>1</sup> This exception had to do with land in the neighborhood of the present Park Square.



years after the enjoinder against using the Common for refuse was issued, the town government adopted a more stringent regulation: —

“Whereas, the comon is att times much anoyed by casting stones outt of the bordering lotts, and other things that are offensive: Itt is therefore ordered that if any person shall hereafter any way annoy the comon by spreading stones or other trash upon itt, or lay any carrion upon itt, every person so offending shall bee fined twenty shillings.”

All this care of the Common had for its object something more than the well-being of cows and sheep. The use of the land as a training-field for the militia must not be forgotten. The annual spring pageants provided by the review of the school-boys' brigade, and, still more, of the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company, typify the close link between the present and the past; for both the Latin School and the “Ancients” are vigorous survivals from the earliest days in Boston. The alternative names of Sentry or Beacon Hill, the eminence from which the Common slopes away, have indeed a military suggestion and significance. If we may believe Edward Johnson, writing in 1654, all the Boston hills, of which Beacon Hill was the most conspicuous, partook of this military character. “All three like overtopping Towers keepe a constant watch to fore-see the approach of forein dangers, being furnished with a Beacon and lowd babling Guns, to give notice by their redoubled eccho to all their Sister-townes.”

One of the very earliest glimpses of the training-field gains something of its picturesqueness from the presence of foreign troops side by side with the local militia. In 1643 La Tour, seeking the aid of

Winthrop and his people against a rival governor of Acadia, came to Boston. The pages of Parkman which describe the visit reveal a company of French soldiery joining with the Boston trained-band in its drill on a muster-field, which the historian calls "probably the Common." The Boston men in steel hats and buff coats acquitted themselves handsomely in the morning. In the afternoon the Frenchmen had their innings, and provided a sensation for which the spectators were not prepared. This was a sham charge. Sword in hand, the visitors made it so suddenly that the women who looked on, catching perhaps the spirit of those who feared a Popish conspiracy of some sort, took it for a true assault and were accordingly alarmed. This, however, did not prevent the peaceful withdrawal of La Tour's men to his ship.

A single recognizable figure brings the similitude of life to any picture. In that rich gallery of ancient Boston scenes, the diary of Samuel Sewall, such a figure is found, and with it a characteristic glimpse of a May training as far back as 1677. "I went out this morning," wrote the diarist, "without private prayer and riding on the Comon, thinking to escape the Souldiers (because of my fearfull Horse); notwithstanding there was a Company at a great distance which my Horse was so transported at that I could no way govern him, but was fain to let him go full speed, and hold my Hat under my Arm. The wind was Norwest" — and the bad cold which the Puritan John Gilpin contracted may well have been ascribed to the omission of his morning devotions.

There is still another aspect of the Common, neither martial nor farm-like, reflected in the description of Boston which John Josselyn

published in London in 1675. "On the South," he wrote, "there is a small but pleasant Common, where the Gallants a little before Sunset walk with their *Marmaleet*-Madams, as we do in *Moorfields*, etc., till a nine a clock Bell rings them home to their respective habitations, when presently the Constables walk their rounds to see good orders kept; and to take up loose people." It is well thus to be reminded that there were Gallants among the seventeenth-century Puritans of Boston, and that some provision was made for hours of relaxation. There are not many such reminders, for the good reason that the subduing of nature, as it spread about them in the wilderness and appeared within them as a thing to be subdued with all the rigors of Calvinistic theology, left little time for anything else.

The Common may be regarded as the centre of the outdoor stage on which many characteristic dramas of local life have been enacted. Each century has had its typical dramas. In the first of our Boston centuries the typical thing was Puritanism, the straitest New England sect of it, with an unyielding certainty of right on its own side, and of wrong in all who disagreed. The completest protestant is never an entirely logical creature, for he cannot endure any protest against his own forms of practice and belief. The most disturbing protestants against the Boston protestantism of the seventeenth century were undoubtedly the Quakers, who made their first appearance here less than thirty years after the settlement of the town. There is no question that they presented a difficult problem. The testimony they felt called upon to bear in support of the truth as they saw it was directed equally against the civil and the religious



order — in so far as the two elements could be separated. Naturally such disturbers of the local peace were not wanted, and the fact was promptly writ clear upon the statutes. Fines were imposed upon citizens who harbored them. Severe measures were taken to drive them out, and if they insisted upon returning, whipping, clipping of the ears, and even borings of the tongue with hot irons were promised as celebrations of the event. The records of the community are not stained by the exaction of these penalties upon the tongue. Such punishments, however, would have been mild in comparison with those which actually were inflicted in carrying out the laws passed at the time of highest animosity against banished Quakers who presumed to come back. It was ordered that they should pay the penalty of death; and because the Common has been regarded traditionally as the scene of the execution of four Quakers,<sup>1</sup> the

<sup>1</sup> Mr. M. J. Canavan in a paper read May 17, 1910, before the Bostonian Society, has held that these executions did not take place upon the Common. The strongest indications that they did not are (1) the fact that many executions in the earliest days occurred on Boston Neck, where they gave the name to Gallows (later South) Bay; (2) that in one of the earliest tracts describing Mary Dyer's execution, the statement, adopted by Besse, is made that she was marched about a mile from the place of her imprisonment to the place of execution; (3) that Samuel Sewall, driving in 1685 to Dorchester, saw, "going thither," the place where the Quakers were executed: it does not appear how direct his route to Dorchester was, or that he surely avoided the Common; and (4) that the journal of Thomas Story, a Quaker traveller to Boston in 1699, describes the gallows on which the Quakers were executed, and seems to place it where the town gallows is known to have stood, on the southerly outskirts of the settlement. On the side of the accepted and frequently repeated placing of the hangings on the Common is the nearest approach to a positive statement on the subject that I have found in the early records. Bishop's book, published immediately after the execution, says, in describing the events of October 17, 1659, that Wilson and others "met them [the prisoners] in your Train-field," where "he fell a Taunting at W. Robinson," apparently just before Robinson went up the ladder. In many other early tracts the place is described merely as "the place of Execution." That the Common was frequently used for executions from the beginning till 1812 there appears to be no doubt. (See Shurtleff, p. 352.)

circumstances of their death may be described in some detail. The temper of seventeenth-century Boston is somewhat clearly revealed in the episode.

The fullest records of the executions were made by writers in sympathy with the Quakers. There was evidently some sympathy with them in Boston on the part of those who were neither law-makers nor annalists — namely, the mass of the people. The deputies to the General Court, the true representatives of the people, were more friendly to them than the magistrates and the clergy, the powers actually in control, and it is hardly strange that these authorities failed to leave us the fullest story of what in the end was sure to reflect small credit upon them. Chiefly, then, from such books as George Bishop's "New England Judged by the Spirit of the Lord" (London, 1661 and 1667), and Joseph Besse's two works, "Abstract of the Sufferings of the People called Quakers" (London, 1733-38), and "Collection of the Sufferings of the People called Quakers" (London, 1753), we may learn something of what took place when the four Quaker victims went to their death. The precise nature of their offenses and of the processes by which they were brought to execution are aside from the present purpose.

Three executions were planned for the day on which the first two took place. This was October 27, 1659. After the Thursday Lecture, the midweek break in the monotony of non-attendance at the meeting-house, a company of two hundred soldiers under Captain James Oliver, "with Drumes and Colours and Halberds, Guns, Swords, Picks and half-picks," as one chronicler has it, escorted Marmaduke Stevenson of Yorkshire and William Robinson, a



London merchant, from the jail, and Mary Dyer from Correction, to the place of execution, for the punishment by their returning from exile. The large guard was taken on with precaution against interference by the people, many of whom felt that matters had gone too far. The three Quakers walked hand in hand, Mary Dyer between the two men. The drums were placed so near them in the procession that if they should try to speak their voices could easily be drowned. Their enemies, however, succeeded in taunting them. To Mary Dyer, no longer a young woman, but of good estate in Rhode Island, where many of her descendants have attained distinction, the marshal, Michaelson, put the question, "Are you not ashamed to walk hand in hand between two young men?"

"No," she answered; "this is to me an hour of the greatest Joy I could enjoy in this World. No Eye can See, no Ear can hear, no Tongue can speak, no Heart can understand the sweet Incomes and Refreshings of the Spirit of the Lord which now I enjoy."

Robinson and Stevenson managed to make themselves heard: "This is your Hour, and the Power of Darkness"; and "This is the Day of your Visitation, wherein the Lord hath visited you." When they neared the gallows-tree — reputed in the traditional versions of the grim story to be the Elm near the Frog Pond, which grew to be Great and Old until a storm in 1860 destroyed its beauty and another in 1876 laid it low — they had to encounter the Reverend John Wilson, "your old bloody Priest Wilson, your High-Priest of Boston," as George Bishop called him. This Quaker historian reports Wilson as having said in a sermon: "He would carry Fire in one Hand, and Faggots in the other, to Burn all the Quakers in the

World.” When the Quakers were on trial it was Wilson — according to Bishop ~~7~~ who gave as his advice, “ ‘Hang them, or else’ (drawing his Finger ~~7~~ <sup>upward</sup> his Throat, so making Signs for it to be cut, if ye did not).” No words of comfort, then, were to have been expected from him or the “others of his Brethren in Iniquity” with whom he stood. “Instead of having a sense upon him, suitable to such an Occasion,” wrote Bishop, “and as usual with Men of any Tenderness, he fell a Taunting at W. Robinson, and shaking his hand in a light scoffing manner, said, ‘Shall such Jacks as you come in before Authority with your Hats on?’ with many other taunting words. To which W. Robinson replied, ‘Mind you, mind you, it is for the not putting off the Hat, we are put to Death.’ ”

The manner of execution appears to have been most simple. A rope tied to a limb of the tree is said to have been fastened also round the victim’s neck as he stood on the lower rungs of a ladder leading to this limb. When he climbed to the top of the ladder, it was suddenly drawn from under him.

If the condemned Quakers had deserved such a fate, it is hard to believe that they could have met it with the fortitude they showed. Bishop’s account of their bearing recalls that of the Christian martyrs canonized for holiness and courage: “So, being come to the place of Execution, Hand in Hand, all three of them, as to a Weding-day, with great cheerfulness of Heart, and having taken leave of each other, with the dear Embraces of one another, in the Love of the Lord, your Executioner put W. Robinson to Death, and after him M. Stevenson.” The final words of Robinson, bound hand and foot, with a neckcloth tied about his face, are recorded:

“I suffer for Christ in whom I live, and for him I die.” “So he being turned off” — in the words of one of the annalists — “M. S. went up and spake to the People, saying, ‘Be it known unto all this day that we suffer not as evil-doers but for Conscience sake’; then he being bound according to the former manner, as the executioner was about to turn him off the Ladder, he uttered these words, saying, ‘this day shall we be at rest with the Lord.’” The words ascribed to them are not identical in the various narratives, in one of which Wilson, “this old Priest in much Wickedness,” has the last word, crying out: “Hold thy Tongue, be silent, Thou art going to Dye with a Lye in thy Mouth.”

Still another victim, Mary Dyer, waited her turn. All the exaltation, or the heroism, of martyrdom was needed to carry her to the end of the day’s work. With her two dead friends before her eyes, she came to the foot of the ladder, where her arms were bound, her skirts fastened about her feet, a handkerchief, lent by Wilson, was tied over her face for a covering, the hangman’s rope placed round her neck. So she climbed upward “to be turned off” — in Besse’s favorite phrase — when a messenger brought word that a reprieve, secured by her son, had been ordered. This was done without her knowledge, and when she was loosed, and desired to come down, she stood where she was, waiting to know what the Lord would have her do. Having given herself up to die, her “mind was already as it were in heaven,” and she said, “She was there willing to suffer as her Brethren did, unless they would annul their wicked Law.” — “Pull her down!” cried the people, ready to drag both ladder and victim to the ground. But the chief marshal and others took her



by the arms, and led her back to prison, whence she was soon sent into Rhode Island.

The barbarities of the day, however, were not quite ended, for the ropes from which the bodies of Robinson and Stevenson hung were cut, and the fall to earth broke Robinson's skull. "Their shirts were ripped off with a knife, and their naked Bodies cast into a Hole of the Earth, which was digged, without any covering; and when some friends came and desired their Bodies to be put into Coffins, and so into some inclosed Ground, where Beasts might not turn them up, your Executioner suffered them to wrap them in Linnen and to put them in again; but to take them away, he suffered them not, saying, He was strictly charged to the contrary." When Bishop goes on to say that Wilson "made a Ballad of those whom ye had martyr'd," one is ready to defer acceptance of the statement until some antiquarian brings the ballad to light. It was counted one of the "providences" of the day, by those in sympathy with the Quakers, that as the great crowd of sightseers was returning home across the drawbridge which connected what is now the North End with the rest of the town, the structure "rose up and one end of it fell upon many, especially a wicked Woman who reviled the Servants of the Lord at their death, whom it greatly bruised, and her flesh Rotted from her bones":—further details are omitted here.

For Mary Dyer to return again to Boston was, in the eyes of reason, sheer fanaticism. But reason had little to do with her course or with that of the Boston authorities. In May of 1660, about seven months after her deliverance from death, she came back to court it once more. Again a band of soldiers, on June 1, marched her to the

gallows. Again the drums before and behind her prevented the people from hearing what she might say. The record in Besse's book preserves a spirited dialogue at the very gallows. It reproduces so vividly a significant scene long associated with Boston Common that it may well be given entire.

“Being gone up the Ladder, some said to her, That if she would return she might come down and save her Life: To which she replied, ‘Nay, I cannot, for in Obedience to the Will of the Lord I came, and in his Will I abide faithful to Death.’ Then Capt. John Webb said, That she had been there before, and had the Sentence of Banishment upon pain of Death, and had broken the Law in coming again now; and therefore she was guilty of her own Blood. To which she returned, ‘Nay, I come to keep Bloodguiltiness from you, desiring you to repeal the unrighteous and unjust Law of Banishment upon pain of Death, made against the Innocent Servants of the Lord; therefore my Blood will be required at your hands, who wilfully do it: But for those that do it in the Simplicity of their Hearts, I desire the Lord to forgive them: I came to do the Will of my Father, and in Obedience to his Will I stand even to Death.’ Then Priest Wilson said, ‘Mary Dyer, O repent, O repent, and be not so deluded and carried away by the Deceit of the Devil.’ To this Mary Dyer answered, ‘Nay, then, I am not now to repent’: And being asked by some, whether she would have the Elders pray for her? She said, ‘I know never an Elder here.’ Being farther ask’d, Whether she would have any of the People pray for her? She answered, She desired the Prayers of all the People of God. Thereupon some scoffing said, ‘It may be she thinks there are none here.’ She looking about said,



‘I know but few here.’ Then they spoke to her again, That one of the Elders might pray for her. To which she replied, ‘Nay, first a child, then a young Man, then a strong Man, before an Elder in Christ Jesus.’ After this she was charg’d with something which was not understood what it was, but she seemed to hear it; for she said: ‘Its false; Its false, I never spoke those words.’ Then one mentioned, that she should have said, she had been in Paradise. To which she answered, ‘Yea, I have been in Paradise these several Days,’ and more she spoke of the eternal Happiness into which she was now to enter. In this well dispos’d Condition she was turned off, and died a Martyr of Christ, being twice led to Death, which the first time she expected with undaunted courage and now suffer’d with Christian Fortitude.”

After the death of Mary Dyer, there was still another Quaker, one William Leddra, hung like his three fellow believers. This last of the series of hangings took place March 14, 1661. The records of what was said and done bear a close resemblance to those of the other executions. The same courage and constancy of faith shone forth. When one of Leddra’s speeches moved the people to sympathy, “this was observed,” says Besse, “by one Allen, a Priest, there present, who to quench that Tenderness, cried out, ‘People, I would not have you think it strange, to see a Man willing to die, for it is no new Thing; and you may read how the Apostle saith, “That some should be given up to strong Delusions, and even dare to die for it.”’ Though the Text doth not say so, but the blind Zeal of the Man hurried him into a perversion of the Scripture.” As the halter was placed round Leddra’s neck, he said: “I commend my righteous

cause unto thee, O God"; and, at the very last: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

The story of Leddra's death has one illumination which the other narratives lacked — the letter of an eye-witness writing immediately after the event. Thomas Wilkie, a stranger in Boston, saw the execution, and wrote thus about it to "Mr. Geo. Lad, Master of the America of Dartmouth, now at Barbadoes":

"BOSTON, *March the 26th*, 1661.

. . . "I saw then, when the man was on the ladder, he looked on me, and called me friend, and said, 'Know that this day I am to offer up my life for the witness of Jesus.' Then I desired leave of the officers to speak, and said, 'Gentlemen, I am a stranger both to your persons and country, and yet a friend of both.' And I cried aloud, 'for the Lord's sake, take not away the man's life, but remember Gamaliel's counsel to the Jews: if this be of man it will come to naught; but if it be of God, you cannot overthrow it; but be careful ye be not found fighting against God.' And the captain said, 'Why had you not come to the prison.' The reason was because I heard the man might go if he would, and therefore I called him down from the tree, and said, 'Come down, William, you may go if you will.' Then Capt. Oliver said, 'It was no such matter,' and asked, what had I to do with it, and bid me be gone. And I told them I was willing, for I could not endure to see this. And when I was in the town, some did seem to sympathize with me in my grief, but I told them, that they had no warrent from the word of God, nor precedent from our country, nor power from his Majesty, to hang the man.

"Your friend,

THOMAS WILKIE."

The sympathy with the grief of this stranger in Boston was not the only evidence of a better feeling. When Leddra was dead, and the executioner cut him down, four of the victim's friends were allowed to catch him in their arms. The executioner stripped the body of its clothing, but the friends "were suffered to put it into a Coffin, and bury it where they thought meet, a piece of Humanity owing not to the Inclinations of the Persecutors, but to the Outcry of the People against the Barbarity used to the dead Bodies of the two men who were put to Death before."

As the reader was cautioned to look upon Dr. Holmes's picture of the Common in 1630 as a bit of poetical description, so he must be sure to remember that the foregoing account of the executions is drawn from the narratives of the Quaker annalists, and to make due allowances for this circumstance. His own reflection, however, will probably convince him that the general truth of the story is to be accepted. The important fact is that in 1659, 1660, and 1661 four Quakers were executed in Boston, because they were Quakers. In the face of this record, credulity is not overtaxed to believe that in detail the authorities and the victims would have behaved very much as Bishop, Besse, and the others say they did. For us of the twentieth century, rejoicing that the Common has become something better than a training-field, something quite other than a cow-pasture, something still more unlike the theatre of cruelties which, begun and continued, might have made the Great Elm and Tyburn Tree synonyms of shame, the important matter is to recall, as best we may, some of the uses, highly characteristic of a seventeenth-century settlement, to which it has been believed that the

Common was originally put. If we would join in a single memory the pastoral, the military, and the tragic employments of the Common, let us bring to mind the inglorious ending of General Humphrey Atherton, a famous soldier in his day. As he was riding home from the Common, after a military training in 1661, his horse shied at a cow, threw him to the ground, and dashed out his brains. The Quakers, of whom he had been "a daring and hardened persecutor," could not refrain from pointing to his death as "a shocking instance of the divine vengeance."



## II

### THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

ENTRANCE of the Eighteenth Century,” wrote Samuel Sewall in the margin of his diary for “Jan<sup>y</sup> 1,  $\frac{1700}{1701}$ .” The record for the day reads: “Just about Break-a-day Jacob Amsden and 3 other Trumpeters gave a Blast with the Trumpets on the co $\bar{m}$ on near Mr. Alford’s. Then went to the Green Chamber, and sounded there till about sunrise. Bell-man said these verses a little before Break-a-day, which I printed and gave them.” The verses themselves are set down in the margin — and pretty poor, though very pious, they are. They need not be given here; but it is well to recall the manner in which the first new century in Boston was announced — solemnly, religiously, and on the Common.

The blast of the trumpet must have been a familiar sound on the training-field. With the martial note the religious was frequently blended. Sewall more than once mentions prayer at the trainings. Apparently it was not always efficacious. On October 6, 1701, he wrote: “Go to prayer. March down and Shoot at a Mark. . . . By far the most missed, as I did at the first.” John Dunton, in his “Letters written from New-England,” tells of a training in 1686 when the captain called the troops into close order for prayer, and prayed himself. “Solemn Prayer in the Field, upon a Day of Training,” remarked Dunton, “I never knew but in New-England.”



Carried over from the seventeenth into the eighteenth century, another custom in which the Common was involved savored more of the boisterous intolerance of the time than of the sincerities in religious belief. This was the celebration of November 5, "Pope Day," when the "gunpowder treason and plot" gave the occasion for noisy demonstrations which bore their evidence to the oneness of life in Boston and in England. In Sewall — again — before the seventeenth century was ended, we find fifty persons attending a bonfire on the Common one rainy November 5; the next evening being fair, about two hundred "hallowed" about it. In the ensuing century the celebration evidently became more elaborate. Some of its aspects at the eve of the Revolutionary period are noteworthy. By that time two rival Pope Day processions, from the North and the South Ends, were customary. In each there were effigies of the Pope, the Pretender, and the Devil, so arranged that boys mounted on platforms could put them through certain motions. When the two processions met, as they were sure to do, a rough-and-tumble fight for the effigies took place. There were broken pates and bloody noses, but a victory for either side was worth winning. If the North-Enders won it, the spoils of the battle were taken to Copp's Hill and burned. If the South-Enders won, the Pope, the Pretender, and the Devil went up in smoke from the Common. From John Rowe's diary we learn that in 1766 there were even three papal processions. In 1774 the patriot leaders brought the North and South End factions to the harmonious support of a common cause, the country, and for the celebration of the last Pope Day in Boston, the rivals joined their forces — as if with

a premonition of organized labor in the years to come — for the single celebration of a “Union Pope.”

The burning of a pretended Pretender was an advance upon the hanging of mortal Quakers. But there remained other tragic uses for what should have been a peaceful plot of ground. The duel between Captain Thomas Smart and John Boydell, which took place one forenoon in 1718, had no more serious immediate results than the wounding of one of the duellists in the arm, the fining of both of them, and their imprisonment for twenty-four hours. Not so the duel in 1728 between Benjamin Woodbridge and Henry Phillips, two young men of excellent place in the community. They quarrelled over cards one night at a tavern-club, took their quarrel to the hill on which the Soldiers' Monument now stands, and fought with small swords. Phillips ran Woodbridge through the body, and left him to die on the Common before morning. By this time he himself, with the aid of his brother and his kinsman Peter Faneuil, had found refuge in the British man-of-war *Sheerness*, just sailing for France. He died there within a year, broken with grief. Whoever will walk past the Granary Burying Ground slowly enough to read through the palings the few inscriptions within reading distance, will find that one of them stands over the grave of poor young Woodbridge. The Autocrat and the Schoolmistress set the example for such an inspection; and if there are any who would rather think that Woodbridge's quarrel was not about cards, they may take the Autocrat's word for it: “Love killed him, I think . . . Yes, there must have been love at the bottom of it.”

Another tragedy of the same year was the drowning of two boys,

George and Nathan Howell, in the "Back Bay," at the foot of the Common. The possibility of skating where the Public Garden now encompasses a mere artificial pond was, of course, extended far into the century after this accident. But there is one point about the calamity which both "places" it in time, and reminds us again of the unity between Old and New England. The news of the drowning was communicated to Dr. Isaac Watts, who, with a sympathy proper to the poet of childhood and faith, made the "sharp and surprising stroak of Providence" the subject of a letter of condolence to the mother of the two boys.

But the drama of the Common at this time was not invariably tragic. In the autumn of 1740, for example, we find it used as the gathering-place for the thousands who wished to hear the young English preacher George Whitefield, and could not be accommodated within the meeting-houses. A newspaper of the times estimates the crowds that listened to him there as ranging from five thousand on one of the early days of his visit to twenty-three thousand at the last — and this at a time when the total population of Boston was about eighteen thousand. What the people escaped by going from the churches to the Common may be gathered from the account in the "Boston Weekly News-Letter," for September 18–25, 1740, of the happenings on September 22: —

"Last Monday in the Afternoon, the Revd. Mr. *Whitefield* intending to preach in the Revd. Mr. *Checkley's* Meeting-House [the "New South"], at the South part of the Town, just before the Time when the Service was to begin, some Noise happened by the breaking a Piece of Board in one of the Gallerys by some to



make a Seat of; it was given out by some imprudent Person, that the Gallerys gave way, (tho' there was no Danger thereof,) the House being prodigiously crowded, the whole Congregation was put into the utmost Confusion and Disorder; so that being in the greatest Concern how to save their Lives, some jump'd off of the Gallery into the Seats below, others out of the Windows; and those below pressing to get out of the Porch-Doors in hast, several were thereby thrown down one over another, and trod upon by those that were crowding out, whereby many were exceedingly bruised and others had their Bones broke: But what is most sorrowful, Two married Women in Town, viz., Mrs. *Storey* & Mrs. *Ingersole*, and a Servant Lad were so crush'd that they dyed a few Minutes after; and on Tuesday Mrs. *Shepard* a Widow of good Repute in Town, and Mrs. *Ruggles* a married Woman died also of the Bruises they received by the Crowd; and some others we hear are so much Hurt, that it is to be feared they cannot recover."

No wonder that the Common was a grateful refuge. The very magnitude of the crowds that flocked there doubtless added — through the psychology of multitudes — to the power of the preacher's words. To the saying of a Boston minister of the time, that under Whitefield's influence "negroes and boys left their rudeness," may well be added an anecdote of which Wendell Phillips is said to have made effective use in a political speech. The story runs that at the time of Whitefield's preaching on the Common — though at a moment when some one else was speaking — a white man found a negro on the outskirts of the crowd, rolling on the ground, crying out, "Oh, Massa Whitefield! Massa Whitefield!" and giving all the

evidences of a conviction of sin. The white man stopped and told the negro it was not Whitefield but quite another person who was preaching. Shamefaced the negro picked himself up and said, "Oh, den I'se gone dirtied myself all for nothin'."

In the "Boston Weekly News-Letter" for October 9-16, 1740, may be found "A Particular Account of the several Collections made for the Orphan-House in Georgia," containing an item of £200, 15s. 6d. collected on the Common. The total, from some sixteen sources in and about Boston, was over twenty-eight hundred pounds — a testimony perhaps as striking as that of the rolling negro, and of Franklin in his "Autobiography," to the persuasiveness of the English preacher. Fifty years later, in 1790, the Reverend Jesse Lee preached Methodism so eloquently under the Great Elm of the Common that he could be compared with none but Whitefield.

Another peaceful employment of the Common is associated with the episode in Boston history which has come down to us under the name of the "Spinning Craze." Before 1720 the Scotch-Irish emigrants to New England brought with them an enthusiasm for spinning which was not carried wholly into New Hampshire, but bore some of its fruits in Boston. Spinning-schools were established. A large building on the present Hamilton Place was devoted to the industry. "Spinning-wheelles," says one of the chroniclers of the period, "were then the hobby-horses of the Publick." In 1749 a society for promoting industry and frugality was established. An account of its fourth anniversary celebration, taken from the "Boston Evening Post" of August 13, 1753, gives the outlines of a



scene of unusual picturesqueness: "Wednesday last being the annual Meeting of the Society for *encouraging Industry and employing the Poor*, the Rev. Mr. *Cooper* of this Town, preached an excellent Sermon before *them*, and a vast Assembly of other Persons of all Ranks and Denominations, in the Old-South Meeting-House, from those Words in 1 Corinthians 13. 5 *Charity seeketh not her own*. — After Sermon £453 old Tenor, was collected (besides the Subscription Money of the Society) for the further promoting that laudable Undertaking. In the Afternoon, about 300 Spinners, all neatly dressed, and many of 'em Daughters of the best Families in Town, appeared on the Common, and being placed orderly in three Rows, at Work, made a most delightful Appearance. — The Weavers also, (cleanly dress'd in Garments of their own weaving) with a Loom, and a young Man at Work, on a Stage prepared for that Purpose, carried on Men's Shoulders, attended by Musick, preceded the Society, and a long Train of other Gentlemen of Note, both of Town and Country, as they walked in Procession to view the Spinners; and the Spectators were so numerous, that they were compared by many, to one of Mr. *Whitefield's* Auditories, when he formerly preached here on the Common." It would have been too much to expect the long continuance of so lively an interest in the domestic arts, and the "Spinning Craze" was short-lived.

A visitor to Boston in 1740 — one Joseph Bennett, some of whose observations have been printed by the Massachusetts Historical Society — notes the results of the first plantation of trees in the Common, which, but for the Great Elm and two other trees, was through all its early history an unshaded field. "For their domestic

amusements," says Bennett, "every afternoon, after drinking tea, the gentlemen and ladies walk the Mall. . . . What they call the Mall is a walk on a fine green common adjoining to the south-west side of the town. It is near half a mile over, with two rows of young trees planted opposite to each other, with a fine footway between, in imitation of St. James's Park; and part of the bay of the sea which encircles the town, taking its course along the north-west side of the Common, — by which it is bounded on the one side, and by the country on the other, — forms a beautiful canal, in view of the walk."

These trees, forming the first of the Malls on the Common, stood on what is now the Tremont Street border. The first, the outer row, was set out, according to Samuel Adams Drake, between 1723 and 1729, the second in 1734. A third row has been said by some to have been planted before the Revolution, but Drake and Shurtleff give the time in the eighties of the eighteenth century. Until the nineteenth was well under way, there was no Mall except this one along the present Tremont Street.

The very barrenness of the Common contributed to its value for military purposes — and it was to these purposes, in the eighteenth century, that it was most characteristically devoted. Its uses as a training-field, a drill-ground, were of course continuous. As early as 1709 we find these uses liberally extended by a young English army officer, Paul Mascarene, commanding an artillery company recruited at the time, who threw up small earthworks at the foot of the Common, and drilled his men at artillery practice. But far greater extensions were still to come, converting the Common into a camp first for friendly, then for hostile troops.

[The War of the Revolution so overshadows the other military activities of the eighteenth century in America that it is easy to forget the conflicts with the French to the northward, and the part which Boston played in them. But before the Revolution Sir William Pepperell's expedition against Louisburg, in 1745, seemed an undertaking of the first magnitude. It was but natural for the three thousand soldiers who sailed with him to have camped, before starting, on the Common. Early in July the news of the fall of Louisburg reached Boston. The joy of the people knew no bounds, and the celebration of the victory was by no means confined to the Common. Neither is the following account of it, taken from the "Boston Evening Post" of July 8, 1745. But the large bonfire for the "less polite," and the "good liquor" served on the Common, should not be torn from their graphic context:—

"As Capt. *Bennet* arrived in the Night, he first carried the General and Commodore's Dispatches to His Excellency, then at *Dorchester*, and on his Return, communicated the joyful tidings to the Hon. Col. *Wendell's* Company of Militia, then on Duty as a military Watch, who, (not able longer to conceal their Joy) about 4 o'Clock, alarm'd the Town, by firing their Guns and beating their Drums, and before five, all the Bells in the Town began to ring, and continued ringing most part of the Day. The Inhabitants thus agreeably surprised laid aside all thoughts of Business, and each one seem'd to strive to out-do his Neighbour in Expressions of Joy. Many Persons who were gone to *Cambridge* to be present at the Commencement, came to Town to rejoice with us, as did many others from the Country, and the Day was spent in firing of Can-



non, feasting, and drinking of Healths, and in preparing Fire-works, &c. against the Evening. And to add to the Pleasures of the Day, Col. *Pollard* and his Company of Cadets were under Arms, and made a very fine Appearance. Now the Churl and the Niggard became generous, and even the Poor forgot their Poverty, and in the Evening the whole Town appeared as it were in a Blaze, almost every House being finely illuminated. In some of the principal Streets were a great variety of Fire-Works, and curious Devices for the Entertainment of the almost numberless Spectators, and in the Fields were several Bonfires for the diversion of the less Polite, besides a large one in the Common, where was a Tent erected, and plenty of good liquor for all that would drink. In a Word, never before, upon any Occasion, was observed so universal and unaffected a Joy; nor was there ever seen so many Persons of both Sexes at one Time walking about, as appeared that Evening, the Streets being as light as Day, and the Weather extremely pleasant. And what is very remarkable, no ill Accident happened to any Person, nor was there any of those Disorders committed, which are too common [on] such Occasions.”

In September of the following year, 1746, the fear of the French fleet, the destruction of which is the theme of one of Longfellow's best ballads, brought sixty-four hundred men of the provincial militia into camp on the Common. Again, in 1758, when the “Old French War” was drawing to a close, a considerable army, about forty-five hundred men, returning from Louisburg under General Jeffrey Amherst, took the Common for its camping-place in Boston. “Between 30 and 40 Transports,” said the “Boston Evening Post”



of Monday, September 18, 1758, "which came out under Convoy of the Captain Man of War, are also arrived, having on board the 2d Battalion of Royal Scots, General Forbes's, Lascelle's, and Webb's Regiments, and also Fraser's Highlanders; they arrived here in good Health, and were all disembarked on Thursday Morning and encamped on the Common; and on Saturday Morning they decamped and proceeded on their March for Lake George."

Through the second decade after this first appearance of royal troops on the Common, the place was to know them well — all too well, the traditional Bostonian would have said. The red coats of the soldiery gave the Common its most distinctive color in the eighteenth century. They did not come with the very first occasions for active discontent with the rule of the Crown. The news of the Stamp Act of 1765 arrived before them, and they were not here when the repeal of the act was joyfully celebrated on the Common in 1766. The "Boston Post-Boy and Advertiser" for Monday, May 26, 1766, describes the scene: "Friday se'nnight to the inexpressible Joy of all we received by Capt. Coffin, the important News of the Repeal of the Stamp Act, which was signed by His Majesty the 18th of March last. . . . In the Evening the whole Town was beautifully illuminated! — On the Common the Sons of Liberty erected a magnificent Pyramid, illuminated with 280 Lamps: The four upper Stories of which were ornamented with the Figures of their Majesties, and fourteen of the worthy Patriots who have distinguished themselves by their Love of Liberty. . . .

"On the Top of the Pyramid was fix'd a round Box of Fireworks horizontally. About one hundred Yards from the Pyramid the Sons

of Liberty erected a Stage for the Exhibition of their Fireworks, near the Work-House, in the lower Room of which they entertained the Gentlemen of the Town. John Hancock, Esq.; who gave a grand and elegant Entertainment to the genteel Part of the Town, and treated the Populace with a Pipe of Madeira Wine, erected at the Front of his House, which was magnificently illuminated, a Stage for the Exhibition of his Fireworks, which was to answer those of the Sons of Liberty: At Dusk the Scene opened by the Discharge of twelve Rockets from each Stage; after which the Figures on the Pyramid were uncovered, making a beautiful Appearance. — To give a Description of the great Variety of Fireworks exhibited from this Time till Eleven o'clock would be endless — the Air was fill'd with Rockets — the Ground with Bee-hives and Serpents — and the two Stages with Wheels of Fireworks of various sorts. . . . At Eleven o'clock the Signal being given by a Discharge of 21 Rockets, the horizontal Wheel on the Top of the Pyramid or Obelisk was play'd off, ending in the Discharge of sixteen Dozen of Serpents in the Air, which concluded the Shew. . . . The Pyramid, which was designed to be placed under the Tree of Liberty, as a standing Monument of this glorious Æra, by accident took Fire about One o'clock, and was consum'd."

Regarding this celebration of the welcome Repeal, John Rowe, a Boston merchant, wrote in his diary for May 19, 1766: "Mr. Hancock behaved very well on this occasion & treated every Person with Cheerfulness. I contributed as much to General Joy as Any Person. The whole was much admired & the day Crowned with Glory & honour." Who can help wondering in what form Mr. Rowe's contribution to "General Joy" expressed itself?

The joy was short-lived. In the very next year, 1767, the tax on tea was imposed, and discontent became general. There were many expressions of it, and naturally the Common was the background for one of the most spectacular of them. On Friday, June 10, 1768, the revenue officials seized a sloop belonging to John Hancock — a proceeding which excited high indignation among the people gathered on the shore. Their conduct is described in the “*Boston Gazette and Country Journal*” of Monday, June 20, 1768: “About 10 o’Clock they went to one of the Docks, and dragged out a large Pleasure-Boat belonging to the Collector, this they drew along the Street with loud huzzaing all the way, into the Common, where they set Fire to it, and burnt it to Ashes; they also broke several Windows of the Houses of the Collector and Inspector-General, which were nigh the Common.” Governor Bernard, describing the occurrence in a letter, said that the boat-burners “got some rum, and attempted to get more; if they had procured it in quantity God knows where this fury would have ended!”

Manifestly the time was at hand for the stricter exercise of authority in Boston. The royal troops must come, and the Common must receive them. On September 30, 1768, two regiments, the 14th and the 29th, landed at Long Wharf, marched up King [State] Street, and thence to the Common. The 29th encamped there, and in the evening the 14th proceeded to Faneuil Hall and was admitted. From this time up to the evacuation of Boston by the British, March 17, 1776, the Common was almost constantly a place of encampment. Regiments were coming and going — even as the first-comers, the 14th and the 29th, were obliged after the Tea



Party, in fulfilment of Adams's demand, "Both regiments or none," to go to the Castle. But the records are richer in comings. These continued up to June 15, 1775, only two days before Bunker Hill. They could be fully catalogued if any useful present purpose were so to be served. Even so long before Lexington and Bunker Hill as August 21, 1774, Lord Percy wrote home: "I have under my command, the 4th, 5th, 38th, & 43rd Reg<sup>ts</sup>, together with 22 pieces of cannon & 3 co<sup>s</sup>. of artillery encamped on the Common" — besides other troops on Fort Hill. On the Common, in these most crowded days, a population equal to that of a goodly village was gathered under canvas. It was a stirring scene and in a companion picture to that of Boston Common in 1630 Dr. Holmes has drawn it vividly: —

1774

The streets are thronged with trampling feet,  
The northern hill is ridged with graves,  
But night and morn the drum is beat  
To frighten down the "rebel knaves."  
The stones of King Street still are red,  
And yet the bloody red-coats come:  
I hear their pacing sentry's tread,  
The click of steel, the tap of drum,  
And over all the open green,  
Where grazed of late the harmless kine,  
The cannon's deepening ruts are seen,  
The war-horse stamps, the bayonets shine.  
The clouds are dark with crimson rain  
Above the murderous hirelings' den,  
And soon their whistling showers shall stain  
The pipe-clayed belts of Gage's men.





BRITISH TROOPS ON THE COMMON IN 1768

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO



Such, in general, was the spectacle. Perhaps we shall see it the more clearly for attempting to fill in some of the details of the picture. The darker tints are frequent enough. Let us seize at once, then, upon the bright color almost invariably associated with the Reverend Mather Byles, the Tory minister of the Hollis Street Church, inveterate punster and Doctor of Divinity by favor of the University of Aberdeen. In L. M. Sargent's enlivening "Dealings with the Dead" the following glimpses of the waggish clergyman on the Common may be found: "From the time of the stamp act, in 1765, to the period of the Revolution, the cry had been repeated, in every form of phraseology, that our *grievances* should be *redressed*. One fine morning, when the multitude was gathered on the Common to see a regiment of red coats paraded there, who had recently arrived — '*Well,*' said the doctor, gazing at the spectacle, '*I think we can no longer complain that our grievances are not red-dressed.*' '*True,*' said one of the laughers who were standing near, '*but you have two d's, Dr. Byles.*' — '*To be sure, sir, I have,*' the doctor instantly replied, '*I had them from Aberdeen, in 1765.*' "

If such flippancy was possible in the face of the soldiery, it is pleasant also to know that the bucolic uses of the Common were not immediately stopped. In the "Boston Gazette" for July 17, 1769, there is a notice of a small Red Cow, "Strayed away from the Common." With a truly revolutionary handling of the language of England, the notice ends: "Whosoever hath or shall stop said Cow, are desired to inform the Printers hereof, and they shall be Rewarded for their Trouble."

Hardly more than a month of camp life on the Common had



passed, when a soldier, Richard Ames, in spite of the intercession of Boston ladies, was shot as a deserter and buried where he fell. Other military executions of desertion are recorded. In the "Boston Evening Post," for Monday, September 12, 1774, we find, for example: "Last Friday Morning, one Valentine Duckett, a Deserter from the 65th Regiment, now at Halifax, was Shot in the Rear of the Camp in the Common, pursuant to the Sentence of a Court Martial." And in the "Diary of a British Officer," said to be Lieutenant John Barker of the 4th (King's Own) Regiment of Foot, there is the cheerless little entry for Saturday, December 24, 1774: "Bad day; constant snow till evening, when it turned out rain and sleet. A Soldier of the 10th shot for desertion; the only thing done in remembrance of Christ-Mass Day."

The people of Boston were not given then, as they are now, to Christmas celebrations. Other habits have had a longer continuance. As early as March of 1769 the Selectmen appointed a Committee to consider, as other committees have so often considered since then, the best measures for "the preservation of the Common." It was one thing to keep their own cattle on it; quite another to have the soldiers use it for Sunday horse-racing. The townspeople, however, even after the troops were long established there, continued to employ it for some of their own purposes. A strange use of it took place on the last Wednesday of May, 1770. The annual ceremonies attending the election of His Majesty's Council by the General Court were transferred, contrary to all precedent, from Boston to Cambridge. The General Court gathered there, the Election Sermon was preached by the Reverend Samuel Cooke;



but certain "friends to the liberties of North America" contrived to have the people themselves gather in Boston, largely on the Common. The "Boston Gazette and Country Journal" for Monday, June 4, 1770, describes the events of the day: "The Morning was ushered in with Musick parading the Streets, and an Ox, which on the Afternoon before was conveyed thro' the Town decorated with Ribbons, Flowers, &c. was early put to the Fire at the Bottom of the Common; the Novelty of an Ox roasting whole, excited the Curiosity of the People, and incredible Numbers from this and the neighbouring Towns resorted to the Spot, to view so unusual a Spectacle." There was a sermon by the Reverend Dr. Chauncy on the text, "Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them"; there was "an elegant Entertainment" in Faneuil Hall, "attended with that Chearfulness, Decency and good Order peculiar to the Favorites of Freedom and Science." Between five and six hundred gentlemen partook of the feast, and joined in the twenty-two prescribed toasts. The "Gazette," returning to the common people and the Common, bears this final record: "The poor of the Town were presented with the Ox which was Roasted for that purpose, and temperately shared in the Festivity of the Day."

Two years later, in June of 1772, one finds other such indications that the Common was not wholly given over to the British troops as the preaching of a young countryman mounted on a stage, and the parade of the Boston militia companies in honor of the King's birthday. A month later, July 7, 1772, the diary of John Rowe describes the fine appearance of the Cadets and other militia on the

Common. On June 4 of the following year, 1773, John Andrews wrote in a letter from the house on Winter Street opposite the Common: "Am almost every minute taken off with the agreeable sight of our militia companies marching into the Common, as it is a general field-day with us." Evidently the troops of Old and New England could still appear in close proximity without the use of gunpowder. It is even a little surprising to find the British troops as tolerant as they were at the end of 1773, about a fortnight after the Tea Party. A family in Dorchester was suspected of rescuing, for its own ends, some of the tea-chests thrown into the harbor. In the "house of old Ebenezer Withington, at a place called Sodom, below Dorchester Meeting House," searchers in Indian garb "found part of a half chest which had floated, and was cast up on Dorchester point. This they seized and brought to Boston Common where they committed it to the flames." The British soldiers could hardly have been blamed if they had interfered with this particular ceremony. Early in 1775 the time came when the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company, wishing to parade, was refused admittance to the Common.

Through 1774 there were many arrivals of fresh troops, and many new encampments on the Common. It was in July that Earl Percy came. Across the Common from the house he occupied, Clinton, arriving with Howe and Burgoyne and many reënforcements in May of 1775, took up his residence in John Hancock's house. In the interval between the coming of Percy and of Clinton, nothing of greater moment to the Colonies and England had happened than the affair of Lexington and Concord. It was from Boston Common,

between ten and eleven o'clock on the night of April 18, 1775, that "all the Grenadiers and Light Infantry of the Army" to use the words of Lieutenant Barker's diary — "making about 600 Men, (under the command of Lt. Coll. Smith of the 10th and Major Pitcairn of the Marines) embarked and were landed upon the opposite shore on Cambridge Marsh." It was to the Common that the more fortunate members of this expedition returned so precipitately. It was from the Common that a large portion of the British troops who fought at Bunker Hill set forth on the morning of June 17. In trenches at the bottom of the Common many of these soldiers were buried when the day's work was done.

After Bunker Hill, the siege which had begun after Lexington became closer. With the Common so thickly populated as it was, the conditions of life upon it grew less tolerable. The heat of summer, the cold of winter — for it may be seen in the Andrews letters how difficult it was to persuade American workmen to build barracks for the troops for whom no adequate housing could be provided — caused many illnesses and deaths, especially among the women and children who followed the camp. There was always, moreover, a certain danger of attack from the American besiegers. One night of October, 1775, came the exploit described by Earl Percy in one of his letters to England, as "an experiment wh the Rebels tried with a piece of cannon or two in a flat-bottomed boat. With these they fired 15 or 20 shot thro' our camp into the Town, when alas, one of the cannon burst, blew up the boat & sent most of the crew to the Devil." Actually but one of the crew appears to have been killed, though eight were wounded. In the camp on shore, we learn



from Belknap's Journal, one man was killed. Altogether it was not an enviable life on the Common towards the end of the British occupation.

The disposition of the troops on the Common and the manner of its fortification are described in every considerable account of Boston during the Revolution. These descriptions might be summarized anew, but to no better purpose than that which is served by copying one of the best of the existing summaries. "The positions of the British defences and encampments on the Common during the winter of 1775-76" — says S. A. Drake in his "Landmarks of Boston" — "were as follows: A small earthwork was thrown up at the northwest corner, a little higher up than the present entrance on Charles Street; this was designed for infantry, and held by a single company. The little elevation mentioned by the name of Fox Hill [near the present 'Centre Gate' of the Public Garden on Charles Street] was nearly or quite surrounded by water at times, and was hence called the island; on this was a small redoubt. At the southwest corner, at a point at high-water mark, — now intersected by Boylston Street extension, — was another breastwork for infantry. . . . On the westerly slope of the hill overlooking the parade, on which the flagstaff is now situated, was a square redoubt, behind which lay encamped a battalion of infantry; to the east, and on a line with the easternmost point of the hill, were two half-moons for small arms, with a second battalion in its rear. About opposite Carver Street, resting on the southwest corner of the burial-ground, was a bastioned work, directly across Boylston Street. This was the second line. On the hill formerly



known as Flagstaff Hill, but now dedicated to the soldiers' monument, the artillery was posted, protected by intrenchments. Immediately behind this hill, stretching from the burial-ground across to Beacon Street Mall, were the camps of three battalions of infantry. . . . None of the works were formidable except the most southern, which was connected with the line on the Neck. The Common was an intrenched camp, with a regular garrison of 1750 men.'

All this military life in a restricted territory must needs leave its physical traces. The soldiers required firewood, and took it from the fence about John Hancock's house, from the fence between the Great (afterwards Tremont Street) Mall and the Common as a whole, and from the trees that shaded this Mall. Their destruction of these trees during the siege so disturbed the Selectmen that they persuaded General Howe to stop it. On the very morning of the evacuation it is reported that their wanton spirit wreaked itself in the cutting-down of several of the largest trees remaining. But it was not only overhead that the returning Bostonians who accompanied or promptly followed Washington's army found the Common changed. The surface of the ground was badly scarred — with holes which had been used for cooking, with ditches round the hill now surmounted by the Soldiers' Monument, with the intrenchments already mentioned. They remained, in diminishing clearness of outline, as mementoes of the British soldiery until the nineteenth century was well begun. Dr. Hale could even recall "playing soldier" as a boy in the redoubts left on Flag-Staff Hill; and Colonel Henry Lee, of the class of 1836 at Harvard, referred

in his later years to "the fortification on the Common — that was levelled when I was in College."

After the evacuation there were still nearly twenty-five years of the eighteenth century to be passed, and through these years the Common continued its ancient service as the background of characteristic events. Here the bonfire which celebrated the surrender of Cornwallis lighted a multitude of happy faces. Here occurred the promiscuous milking of all the cows on the historic pasturage when Madam Hancock happened to need an unwonted supply of milk for the entertainment of guests suddenly arriving from the French fleet. Here, in the Frog Pond, the local tradition insisted that the common sailors of the fleet proved themselves true Frenchmen by hunting for frogs. There has been no attempt to enumerate every striking occurrence of the first three quarters of the eighteenth century; nor shall such an effort be made for the final fourth. The reasons for omitting many items may be less defensible than that which applies to the thrice-familiar story of the coasting boys and the British general. The true reason for its omission will be found on a bronze tablet fastened to the School Street fence of City Hall.

### III

## THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

**I**T was during the nineteenth century that the greatest changes in the physical aspect of the Common were wrought. From the almost treeless field, lending itself so serviceably to the purposes of His Majesty's troops, it has changed by degrees into the wooded park which, in large measure, it has now become. As the changes in any object are apt to work from the edges inward, so the most notable improvements in the Common began upon its borders. The Tremont Street Mall — which took the name of Lafayette after the beloved Frenchman's visit in 1824, and lost the glory of its trees when the Subway was built in 1895 — had its origin, as we have seen, before the eighteenth century was half gone. The planting of many of the trees on the Beacon Street Mall is closely associated with what was called in its day the "Madison War," an unpopular conflict in Federalist Boston. A sum, amounting to about twenty-five hundred dollars, was raised to build fortifications for the defence of the harbor. It was not all expended, and in 1816 the elms, now venerable, which shade the walk along Beacon Street, and supplement those previously placed by John Hancock, in 1780, opposite his own house, were set out with the residue from this fund. In 1823 the first Mayor Quincy began the planting of the Charles Street Mall, completed the next year, and in 1826 replaced the poplar trees along Park Street with the elms which now border its Mall. In 1836, under Mayor Armstrong, the Boylston

Street Mall was completed by absorbing a portion of the burial-ground, and for the first time the Common was entirely surrounded, as at present, with broad walks. The origin and names of the intersecting paths across the Common would extend the catalogue of improvements far beyond our present limits.

To balance these additions, there was one important subtraction in the first third of the century — that of the cows, in 1830, by Mayor Otis. These ancient tenants of the Common were forced in the course of events to give way before a growing population of human beings. If it could no longer be recorded of youthful Emersons that one item of their daily chores was to drive the family cow to and from the Common, the past still survives in the restriction upon certain Mount Vernon Street real estate that a passage through and across it must be maintained ample enough for a cow to make its way towards the pasture of earlier days.

The cows are gone, but the Frog Pond remains. It is not, to be sure, the rural pool which the beginning of the century found there, with shelving banks, and partly shaded by a pollard-willow leaning out across the water. The boys of Boston can no longer believe, like those of a hundred years ago, either that it is unfathomable or that a frigate could be floated upon it. In 1826 its shores were curbed, and the introduction of city water in 1848 robbed its sources of mystery. But a Bostonian still living in 1910 could recall drawing “shiners” and even horn-pout from its depths — or shallows; and continued to associate with the Frog Pond, as Dr. Holmes himself might conceivably have done, the couplet —

Oh, what are the prizes we perish to win  
To the first little “shiner” we caught with a pin!



The changes that came within the Common during the nineteenth century certainly had their abundant counterparts in its surroundings. On three out of four bordering streets the dwelling-houses have given place almost entirely to business, and the encroachment upon the fourth is well under way. Leaving out of account the purely modern structures to be seen across these streets, and the entire substitution of an urban for a marine view to the westward, the landmarks themselves, almost without exception, belong to what may be called the new order. The conspicuous exception is the State House, and that had stood but two years before 1800. Another landmark then existing disappeared when the Hancock house, to the sorrow of later generations, was destroyed in 1863. In the course of the nineteenth century, the dignified Colonnade Row of dwelling-houses facing the Tremont Street Mall, came and went. In 1809 the Park Street Church came — and it has remained long enough to present a certain aspect of antiquity. As the building in which Dr. Smith's "America" was first sung, it has long possessed a distinctive association. It must have found waiting for it the winds for which in turn waited the excellent *mot* that makes its oft-repeated cry for the tethering of a shorn lamb on Brimstone Corner. The meeting-house and the winds, tempered somewhat by the familiar jest, have even lent themselves to the increase of local story. The era of good feeling between the older and the newer branches of the Congregational order could hardly have begun when the story was first told. A rhymed version of it is called

*Boston Common*

## A LEGEND OF BRIMSTONE CORNER

The Devil and a Gale of Wind  
Danced hand in hand up Winter Street.  
The Devil like his demons grinned  
To have for comrade so complete  
A rascal and a mischief-maker  
Who'd drag an oath from any Quaker.

The Wind made sport of hats and hair  
That ladies deemed their ornament;  
With skirts that frolicked everywhere  
Away their prim decorum went;  
And worthy citizens lamented  
The public spectacles presented.

The Devil beamed with horrid joy,  
Till to the Common's rim they came,  
Then chuckled, "Wait you here, my boy,  
For duties now my presence claim  
In yonder church on Brimstone Corner,  
Where Pleasure's dead and lacks a mourner;

"But play about till I come back."  
With that he vanished through the doors,  
And since that day the almanac  
Has marked the years by tens and scores,  
Yet never from those sacred portals  
Returns the Enemy of Mortals.

And that is why the faithful Gale  
Round Park Street Corner still must blow,  
Waiting for him with horns and tail —  
At least some people tell me so —  
None of your famous antiquarians,  
But just some wicked Unitarians.

But it was the hand of man, and not the winds or any word of man concerning them, which made of the Common and its surroundings the admirable stage and setting for so many salient manifestations of Boston life during the nineteenth century. It is both inevitable and refreshing to find that the chief associations of the Common, ever since the departure of the British troops, have been those of enjoyment. More than at any earlier time it became the local theatre of public ceremonies and spectacles, and of healthy play. A few glimpses of characteristic scenes will suggest something of the extent to which these valuable purposes have been served.

Lafayette's visit in Boston in 1824 stands forth in local annals as an occasion of special splendor. The civic, academic, and social celebrations in honor of the visitor were not enough. On Monday, August 30, a great militia review took place on the Common, where two hundred tents were pitched, besides a great marquee for the shelter of twelve hundred persons at dinner. On the preceding Friday there had been a smaller ceremony in which Lafayette himself bore a picturesque part. The New England Guards, a "crack" company of the day, invited him to attend their artillery practice on the Common. A target floated in the Back Bay, somewhere in the neighborhood of the present Berkeley or Clarendon Street. From the side of Flag-Staff Hill the cannon was pointed out across the marshes and water extending beyond Charles Street. The Governor and the visiting General "honored the company," as the "Advertiser" expressed it, "by firing each a gun with his own hand." The popular enthusiasm which every act and word of Lafayette's excited is almost beyond present comprehension. It may well be

imagined, then, with what interest his aim at the mark was watched, and with what delight the crowd soon saw that he had struck the target just a little above the centre. With such a friend, no wonder our War of Independence had succeeded! If he had missed — but no, the mind refuses to face such a possibility. When he returned to Boston, to be present at the laying of the corner-stone of the Bunker Hill Monument, on the fiftieth anniversary of the battle, June 17, 1825, it was from the Common — the point of departure of the British soldiers a half-century before — that the local troops started in the early morning on their march to Charlestown.

In 1833 another distinguished visitor, General Andrew Jackson, came to Boston, and much has been written about the circumstances connected with his receiving the degree of LL.D. at Harvard. But the Common again took its place as the background of picturesque incident, recorded in the pages of Josiah Quincy's "Figures of the Past." In his capacity of special aide-de-camp to the President during his visit, and in preparation for the review of the Boston Brigade to take place on the Common on the afternoon of June 21, Mr. Quincy had secured trained parade-horses for the use not only of General Jackson, but of the Vice-President, Martin Van Buren, and members of the Cabinet and presidential suite. In the morning Van Buren announced that he and the other members of the Cabinet and suite would not appear at the review, and the horses, no longer required by the visitors, were promptly engaged by officers of the local militia. At the last moment the Vice-President and the others changed their minds, and such horses as could then be found were got for them, and with the help of military trappings were made



to look as warlike as possible. Let the original narrator go on with the story: "We mounted and proceeded to the field in good order; but the moment we reached the Common the tremendous discharge of artillery which saluted the President scattered the Cabinet in all directions. Van Buren was a good horseman and kept his seat; but, having neither whip nor spur, found himself completely in the power of his terrified animal, who, commencing a series of retrograde movements of a most unmilitary character, finally brought up with his tail against the fence which then separated the Mall from the Common, and refused to budge another inch. In the meantime the President and his staff had galloped cheerfully round the troops and taken up their position on the rising ground near the foot of Joy Street, to receive the marching salute. 'Why, where's the Vice-President?' suddenly exclaimed Jackson, turning to me for an explanation. 'About as nearly on the fence as a gentleman of his positive political convictions is likely to get,' said I, pointing him out. I felt well enough acquainted with Jackson by this time to venture upon a little pleasantry. 'That's very true,' said the old soldier, laughing heartily; 'and you've matched him with a horse who is even more non-committal than his rider.' "

In the year of General Jackson's visit, 1833, the Indian chief Black Hawk was released from the imprisonment which had followed his defeat, the year before, in the Black Hawk War. Four years later, in 1837, he visited Boston with a company of his Sacs and Foxes. The community which had entertained so notable an Indian fighter as Jackson was hospitable also to the conquered Indians. On October 30, 1837, they were received at the State

House. The "Advertiser" of the next day tells something of the ceremony, and goes on to say that "the Governor and suite, with the Indian delegation, and the public officers, were escorted to an open square in the Common, where, for a considerable length of time, the warriors performed a great variety of war-dances, to the great amusement of an immense concourse of spectators. We have rarely witnessed so vast and dense a crowd, as were assembled about the State House, on the Common, and in the streets adjoining it. The crowd was often so excessive as apparently to endanger the lives of women and children, yet we have not heard that any one was injured." An eye-witness of the scene is reported as writing: "Their dresses of the skins of wild animals with the horns upon them, their weapons decorated with everything in savage use that could make a clatter and a frightful show, their hideous and grotesque manœuvres, their wild onsets, their uncouth motions in the dance, and their unearthly yell, made them a most impressive spectacle." Emerson wrote of them in his Journal as "Our Picts," looking "as if the bears and catamounts had sent a deputation." They were attended by "several companies of the élite of the militia" — but the central fact that the crowd and the soldiery gathered to see a war-dance of authentic Indian braves on Boston Common is what renders the occasion memorable.

In the following decade the "Water Celebration," October 25, 1848, marked a civic achievement of the highest order. We take so completely for granted to-day our water-supplies in town and country that the introduction of a system of city water seems a commonplace. It was a different matter when the water of Lake

Cochituate was first rendered available for the daily uses of Boston citizens. A highly variegated procession paraded the streets, bringing its march to an end on the Common. There the Frog Pond became literally the centre of the stage, for the Mayor and other dignitaries took their place on a platform over the middle of it. When the water was turned on, and the fountain leaped high into the air, the school-children, assembled with representatives of every other element of the population, sang Lowell's Ode, written for the occasion, beginning "My Name is Water"; the bells rang, cannon were fired, rockets soared aloft; cheering, laughter, and even tears paid their spontaneous tribute to the completion of a great undertaking. Thirty-five years later, a school-boy's remembrances of the day provided the theme for an effective stanza in the verses read by the Honorable Robert S. Rantoul at a Latin-School dinner:

Behold the stately pageant wind along the choking street!  
From mart and house-top streaming flags our civic feast-day greet!  
By the dark Frog-pond's mimic flood I see our cohorts drawn,  
As, line on line, by Beacon Hill, they tramp the sloping lawn.  
I feel October's eager air toy with each silken fold  
Of that bright flag whose "P.L.S." our modest legend told.  
I hear the bells, with clangorous tongue the waning day ring out;  
I watch the rockets' fiery trail — I catch the exultant shout  
That rolled — it seems but yester-e'en — along the Park Street crest  
Just as the red Autumnal sun sank in the purple west,  
From State House dome, down Flag-Staff Hill, to lazy Charles's banks —  
The wild huzza that scaled the sky from out those school-boy ranks,  
When from its base of molten bronze the crystal column rose!  
Long Pond, at last, by Blackstone's Spring, in iron arteries flows!  
And Boston claims her destined bride, the fair Cochituate,  
As Quincy turns the water on, in Eighteen Forty-Eight!



In September of 1851 the city celebrated with three days of festivity, known as the "Railroad Jubilee," the opening of railway connections with the Canadas and the West. From Washington came President Fillmore, with members of his Cabinet; and from Canada, Lord Elgin, then Governor-General of British North America, with his suite. On the first day, September 17, the Common was merely the scene of a military review by the President. On the third day, Friday the 19th, it was the terminus of an elaborate military, industrial, and civic procession, which passed, just before disbanding, between lines of five thousand school-children lining the Park Street, Beacon Street, and Charles Street Malls. "The appearance of this array of intelligent and happy boys and girls, extending more than a mile," says the writer of the official account of the Jubilee, "could not fail to make, upon every reflecting mind, a deep and most delightful impression." The reflecting mind, however, was not all that required satisfaction, and the parade was followed by a dinner for thirty-six hundred persons in a mammoth pavilion erected on a level space adjoining the Tremont Street Mall, opposite West Street. The flags of Great Britain and the United States adorned it without and within, where also a profusion of mottoes, some of them calling for the reciprocity of trade which is still an object of desire, prompted the diners to noble sentiments. There was no less a profusion of oratory — from Lord Elgin, Governor Boutwell, Edward Everett, Robert C. Winthrop, and others. President Fillmore himself, obliged to leave the banquet early, called forth applause and cheering of special vigor when he declared: "I thought, when I entered your city, that I saw Boston in all its glory.



I knew that it had its 'merchant princes,' but I did not know until to-day, that it had its mechanic noblemen of nature." The "mechanic noblemen" who had carried in the procession such mottoes as "A New Way to Raise the Wind," over the exhibit of the bellows-makers, and "The Country's Safe," over a truck-load of "Salamander Safes," must have regarded the President as a worthy fellow-craftsman, in phrase-making.

The visit of Lord Renfrew, as King Edward VII of England styled himself when he visited Boston in October of 1860, called the Common again into requisition for a military review. At one o'clock on Thursday the 18th, the Prince of Wales, dressed in the uniform of a colonel of the British Army, and mounted on Colonel T. Bigelow Lawrence's horse "Black Prince," which the sculptor Ball afterwards used as the model for the bronze charger of General Washington in the Public Garden, reached the foot of Flag-Staff (now Monument) Hill under an imposing escort, and was greeted by a salute of artillery. At about the same time a procession including the Mayor, representatives of the city government, and invited guests arrived on the small elevation south of Flag-Staff Hill. The Prince, attended by the Governor and his staff, and the members of his own suite, many of them in British uniforms, rode up and down the line of troops extending the whole length of the parade-ground and the Beacon Street Mall, and received the usual salutes. Then the entire division passed in review before the Prince. If he learned that the Independent Boston Fusileers left the line with all their officers because they imagined themselves wronged in the position assigned them, and that the captain of a Braintree company was placed under

arrest for bringing his men to the Common in their new gray uniforms in defiance of an order to appear in the regulation dress worn by the other companies of their regiment, it may be hoped that he knew also of the military executions required to maintain the discipline of the British troops encamped on the same field eighty-five years before.

These ceremonies, with others which are best recalled through old-time prints, were the exceptional splendors of the Common. Every year there were lesser glories, diminishing, to be sure, as the century wore on. The General Election of State officers was moved from the time-honored last Wednesday in May. The annual Muster or Training of local militia, formerly held in October, has passed with the passing of the "fuss and feathers" period in military life; yet the parade-ground is still of service in the long afternoons of spring for the drilling of local companies of the State militia. The Artillery Election, early in June, has an importance relatively far smaller than of old. Even the Fourth of July, with the increased facilities for getting away from city celebrations, and now with a River Basin for the display of fireworks, is by no means what it was. Through a considerable part of the nineteenth century, however, all of these festivals were enthusiastically observed upon the Common — for the time being a place of special delight to the juvenile members of the population. The Malls, separated from the rest of the Common by fences, were crowded with "attractions." Between the inner and outer fence — on the edge of the street — the venders of holiday refreshments put up their tents and plied their trades. On the Tremont Street Mall, we are told, there were

three rows of tents — “the easterly row for candy-sellers, the middle generally for cake and bun-venders, and the westerly row for the ancient election beverages, which were the freest liquid used on gala days.” From the other attractions of the place the Punch and Judy shows long survived, and the exhibitor of astronomical wonders — Dr. Holmes’s “Galileo of the Mall” — still swept the skies in 1910.

The public conscience was less sensitive in earlier days than at present, and on July 4, 1810, the town itself is reported to have supplied four hogsheads of rum for public consumption. Children were allowed a latitude of diet which would fill a modern parent with consternation. It is no wonder that Dr. Hale, after describing in his “New England Boyhood,” the *mélange* of tamarinds, dates, oysters, candy, “John Endicotts,” ginger and spruce beer, in which the boys of his generation indulged themselves, exclaimed, “Why we did not all die of the trash we ate and drank on such occasions, I do not know.” But the community and the boys seem to have been all young and happy together, and never to have realized what perils they were escaping. As everything grew older and more respectable, the grog and gambling and other doubtful diversions were banished, and the visitor to the Common upon a modern Fourth of July must needs add to the spectacle of booths and holiday-makers a liberal mixture of imagination if he would see the Common in its former glory.

Between the two election days — the General and the Artillery — there was a deep gulf fixed. The first, absolutely democratic, was vulgarly called “Nigger ’Llection.” On the second, white persons only were allowed on the Common. The injustice of the distinction



so exasperated the negro cook and steward of the ship *Canton Packet*, belonging to the Perkins brothers, that when he was left in charge of the vessel while the captain and crew went to the Common for the enjoyment of the Artillery Election day of 1817, he fired a pistol into the ship's powder and blew her, and himself, to pieces.

For the losses of picturesqueness more or less directly affecting the Common during the past century, there have been some compensating gains. Dr. Hale described the four chief functions of the Common in his boyhood as (1) a pasture for cows, (2) a playground for children, (3) a place for beating carpets, and (4) a training-ground for the militia. On the first and last of these uses something has already been said. On the third it is hardly necessary to dwell. The second, on the contrary, might almost serve by itself as the subject for a small volume. At a time when there was little of Boston except "Boston Proper," when the present outlying parks, avenues, and water-fronts were unknown, inaccessible, or remote from population, the Common provided the inevitable outlet for the energies of the young. It is safe to say, moreover, that just because it was the playground of so many Bostonians of the older generation, it has taken a hold upon their affections and imaginations which time has not relaxed. They look back upon it, much as they remember the country holidays of childhood, with a peculiar fondness. And why should they not? There was the Frog Pond for the water-supply of firemen's play-outs, for the sailing of toy boats in summer, for skating in winter. There was the Wishing Stone near the Joy Street gate, a rough rock on and round which it was the



custom to perform certain ritual observances in the belief that wishes made upon their completion would come true. There was the popular sport of kite-flying. Mr. J. D'W. Lovett, in his admirable "Old Boston Boys and the Games they Played," tells of the special skill of Dr. Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, mayor and historian, among the gentlemen who made and flew kites for their children, and recalls especially several kites "which resembled owls with large, blinking eyes, and which were most effective in the air." There was hockey, and there was baseball. Mr. Lovett, a famous player in his day, records even the part which the devotees of the national game as played on the Common took in a city election. The ground was ploughed up in the spring of 1869 and the game discontinued. In December came the election of Mayor and Aldermen. The ball-players set about to do what they could for the choice of candidates known to favor athletic sports and the old uses of the Common. They printed a non-partisan ticket, under the emblem of a red ball, distributed this ballot with proper exhortations at the polls, and had the satisfaction of seeing Mayor Shurtleff, antiquary and maker of kites, returned to office.

Above all there was coasting. Again in Mr. Lovett's pages it is graphically pictured. The sleds, beautifully made, and bearing such fanciful names as "Comet," "Cave Adsum," and "Dancing Feather," were objects of admiration and pride. Racing was the order of the day. The cry of "Lullah" cleared the track. The "Long Coast," from the corner of Park and Beacon Streets to the West Street entrance and along the Tremont Street Mall, was the favorite course, though the Beacon Street Mall, the path from Joy

Street, and the hill still dedicated to coasting, were also used. In earlier times, when Dr. Hale was young, the smallest boys coasted on the Park Street Mall. In the seventies the double-runner, or double-ripper, came into popularity. Sleds of this type were often elaborate structures. In the "Globe" for January 27, 1875, the first appearance of the "Highlander" on the Common was described: "It is a long double-runner of the usual pattern, painted red, with a head-light like a juvenile locomotive, and a steering apparatus on the tiller principle. It is cushioned quite elegantly, and has side rests for the feet of the coasters, of whom it will accommodate eight or ten. A large white streamer ornaments the prow, and there are brass trimmings and handles along the sides." The "Herald," of the same day places the cost of the "Highlander" at two hundred and fifty dollars. With the increase of these monster sleds, the roping-off of the coasts became a necessity for safety; and where the lengthwise paths of the Common crossed the coasts, bridges for foot-passengers were erected. But in spite of precautions, accidents became too frequent, and coasting in this more elaborate form was stopped. Though life and limb were henceforth more secure, one of the most characteristic local spectacles disappeared.

A safer employment of the Common was made by the many Bostonians of the nineteenth century who made a practice of walking round the outside of it every morning before breakfast. Daniel Webster is remembered as one of these, and Edward Everett, with his son William fitting his boyish stride to the paternal measure. Rufus Choate in this morning promenade is said to have studied his German. The walks of the Common have, indeed, been indefi-

nately useful. In one of them Emerson urged upon Whitman the omission of portions of his "Leaves of Grass," and Whitman, knowing that he could never hear the argument better presented, went his way unmoved. In another, the Long Path, the Schoolmistress and the Autocrat began their walking of the long path of life together, and were greeted by the old gentleman who "said, very charmingly, 'Good-morning, my dears!'" As early as 1821 a "Surveyor and Topographer," John G. Hales, printed in his "Survey of Boston and Its Vicinity" a "Table showing the rate per hour a person is moving by the time taken to pass the long Mall from the fence on Park Street to the fence on Boylston Street." The first of twenty entries shows that a speed of one mile an hour is attained by taking 19 minutes 8.86 seconds for "passing through the Mall." This snail's pace is gradually quickened till ten miles an hour is scored by covering the distance in 1 minute, 54.85 seconds. To see a good Bostonian, with Hales's little book and an open watch in his hands, making his ten miles an hour down the Tremont Street Mall would have been quite as exciting as the later spectacle of coasting.

Safer even than walking were the pleasures of watching the animals in the Deer Park which from 1863 to 1882 was maintained on the Boylston Street Mall between the Burial-Ground and Tremont Street; and of repairing to the Smokers' Retreat or Circle which flourished soon after the middle of the century for the benefit of lovers of tobacco forbidden to enjoy it on the Common as a whole.

The pomp and circumstance of special events, the daily pleasures and pursuits of Boston life, ran their course on the Common through the nineteenth century just as the men of that vanished and vanishing

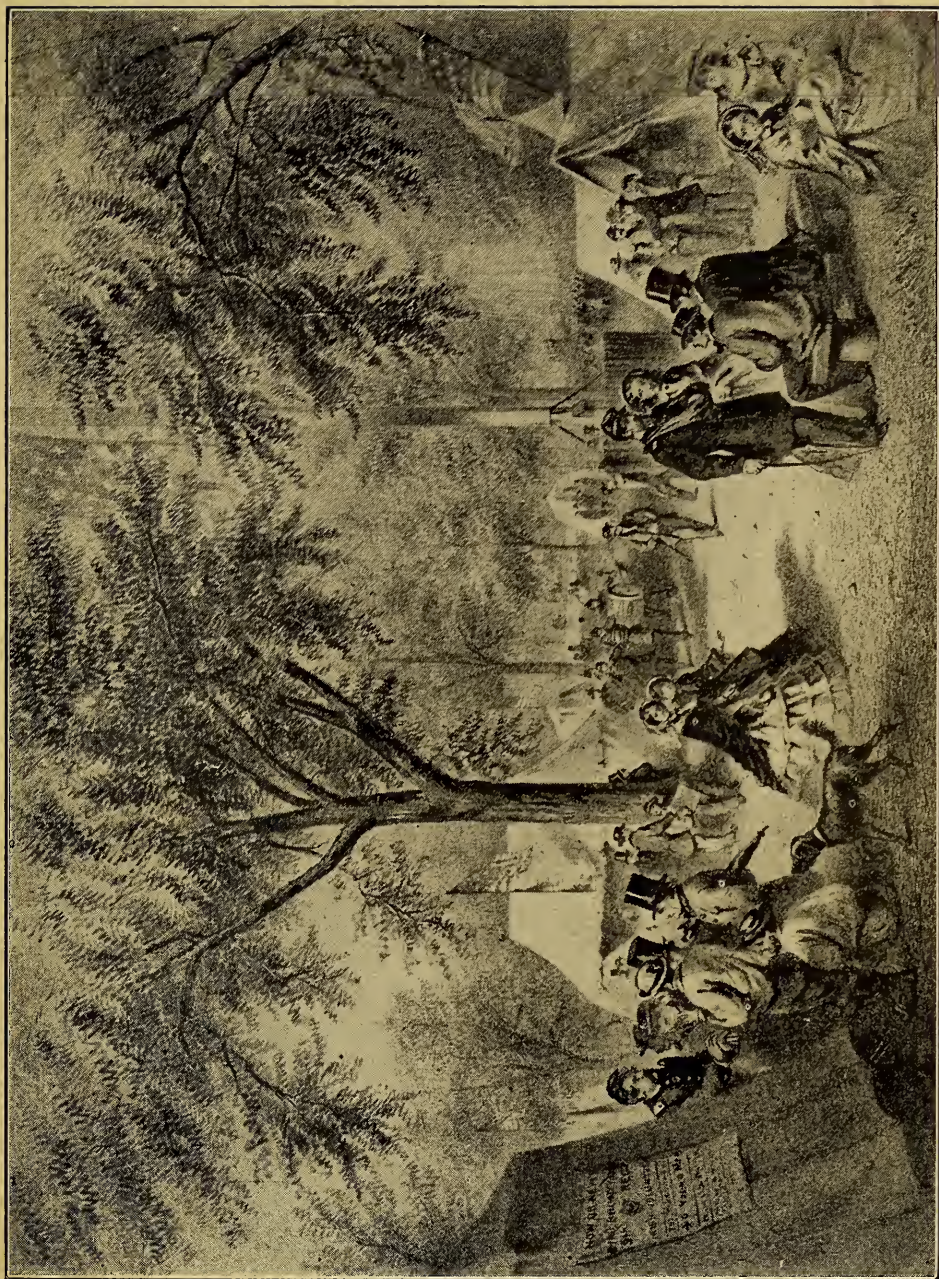


time led their individual lives. The life of every nineteenth-century American whose period of maturity included the four years of the Civil War is inevitably scrutinized for the part he bore in the conflict, or at least for his attitude towards it. But places as well as men may be subjected to this special scrutiny — and the Common emerges from it as a place of poignant association with the ardors and the pathos of the war-time.

Even before the storm broke, there was a foretaste, in the summer of 1860, when Ellsworth's Zouaves visited Boston, of what was coming. Their drill on the Common, on July 23, must have given an unfamiliar impression of fighting men. Not only their bizarre uniform, but their remarkable dexterity in the manual of arms, distinguished their exhibition sharply from previous military performances. The spectators are said to have numbered fifteen or twenty thousand, including many ladies and representatives of local military bodies. The visitors, after the manner of La Tour's Frenchmen in 1643, brought their drill to a sensational close, according to the "Advertiser" of the following day, "with a grand zouave charge in which they made a violent rush towards the spectators, accompanied with a savage yell, which caused them to beat a hasty retreat, but the order to halt was given before the bristling bayonets reached the line." The interest in the entire spectacle could hardly have been keener had it been known that Colonel Ellsworth himself, within a year, was to be among the first of the conspicuous officers to perish in the Union cause.

The days were indeed at hand when the Common was to be used less for mimic warfare than for a rallying-point of soldiers departing





RECRUITING ON FLAGSTAFF HILL IN THE CIVIL WAR





for actual battle or returning from it. The immediate response of Massachusetts to the President's first call for troops on the fall of Fort Sumter gave scanty time for display. But for a severe storm on Tuesday, April 16, the gathering companies would have assembled on the Common, instead of in Faneuil Hall. On Wednesday the 17th Governor Andrew gave God-speed from the steps of the State House to the first armed troops moving from the North — to the Sixth Regiment, about to fight its way through Baltimore, to the Fourth and the Third, sailing direct for Washington and Fortress Monroe. At noon of the 19th the Light Artillery fired a salute on the Common in memory of the Battle of Lexington. Later in the day the companies of the Fifth Regiment began to gather there, and from this time forward the thoughts of "battles long ago" gave place to the immediate concerns of the country. It would be impossible in the present space to chronicle all the farewells to departing regiments, the offerings of rest and food to Maine and New Hampshire troops on their passage through Boston, the delight of boys permitted to fill the soldiers' canteens, the recruiting activities, the receptions to returning regiments, the musterings-out — all the war-time scenes enacted on the Common. The records of the period overflow with them. Here it must suffice to point out a few of the most salient and characteristic.

The day on which the first departure from Boston of a regiment enlisted for three years took place — June 15, 1861 — was hot and sultry. Wearing their overcoats, the men of the First Massachusetts Regiment marched in the early morning from Camp Cameron in North Cambridge to the Common. Exhausted as they were on

their arrival, there were trying experiences ahead. A multitude of friends, parents, wives, and sweethearts, assembled on the borders of the parade-ground, roped off on all but the Charles Street side. From the "Advertiser" of June 17 it appears that the crowd on this side began the advance upon the troops. "The line swayed to and fro a few moments," writes the regimental historian, "and then, over the rope, in every direction, the earnest and excited mass of humanity plunged; and much more speedily than it takes to write it, officers, soldiers, and civilians were mixed up in one immense throng of people, weeping, laughing, embracing, clinging to one another, and presenting here and there scenes so affecting, that the recollection of them is as fresh and vivid to-day as on the evening when they transpired." A veteran officer of the regiment, now an octogenarian,<sup>1</sup> said recently in describing the scene: "I myself did what I should never think of doing now — I kissed several young women I had never seen before." At last about two thirds of the regiment fell into line, and the remainder straggled along with the crowd of spectators to the Providence Station, where a banner which could not be given to the regiment in the confusion on the Common was duly presented. Nearly three years later, on May 28, 1864, the First Massachusetts was mustered out of service on Boston Common.

A month after the departure of the First Massachusetts, the Twelfth, known as the Webster Regiment and commanded by Daniel Webster's son Fletcher, came up to the Common, on July

<sup>1</sup> When these words were written, Dr. Samuel A. Green, to whom they refer, was still living.



18, 1861, from Fort Warren in Boston Harbor, to receive a banner. The speech of presentation was made by Edward Everett, and Colonel Webster replied on behalf of his regiment. There was a drill both before and after the generous "collation" which the city provided for the men under the trees of the Beacon Street Mall and for the officers under a large marquee. The legend that the song of "John Brown's Body" was first sung on Boston Common has its origin in the doings of this day. Apparently the song was made at Fort Warren by members of the Second Battalion of Massachusetts Infantry, known as "The Tigers," many of whom enlisted in the Twelfth Regiment. "It was this regiment," says Mr. Louis C. Elson, in "The National Music of America," "that bore the song to popularity." As they marched down State Street from the Common on the evening of July 18, to reëmbark for Fort Warren, "the order 'route step' was given" — said the "Advertiser" of the next morning — "and the men broke out into the now popular 'John Brown Army Hymn,' by way of enlivening the rest of their march." The words "now popular" indicate clearly that the song was already making its way. The regiment was soon ordered to the front — and Mr. Elson writes that he "has spoken with many people who first heard the tune, and in a manner which imprinted it forever in their memory, on Boston Common, when Colonel Fletcher Webster's men marched across it on their way from Fort Warren to the Providence depot, to take cars for New York." They sang it again, says Mr. Elson, on Broadway in New York, and "sang it into the war." From the "History of the Twelfth Massachusetts Volunteers" we learn that on the day of final depar-

ture from Fort Warren (July 23) the song was sung on State Street and "again near the Common." Whether "near" or "across" preserves the accurate truth of history, surely this association of the song with the Common may be held in close companionship with the first singing of "America" in Park Street Church, within hearing distance of the same plot of ground.

The catalogue of departures might be extended to great length, but it may not be cut short without at least a mention of the passing of Colonel Shaw's Fifty-Fourth (colored) Regiment before Governor Andrew on the State House steps, May 28, 1863, its march down Beacon Street in front of strongholds of conservatism which looked with doubtful eyes upon the affiliation of black and white, its review upon the Common, where Frederick Douglass saw two of his sons in the ranks. In spite of the doubting few, the heart and soul of the community marched with the regiment to Battery Wharf in the afternoon, and followed the white officers and their black men into the fateful South. The feeling not only of this day, but of those others when the Fifty-Fifth Infantry and the Fifth Cavalry started from the Common to the front, lives on in the bronze of Saint-Gaudens.

In the summer of 1862 the Common became an important headquarters for recruiting. On the Fourth of July the President called for three hundred thousand men to enlist for three years, or until the war should end. A Citizens' Committee of One Hundred and Fifty took the matter in hand. A recruiting tent was put up opposite West Street on the Common, and on the parade-ground music-stands and platforms for speakers were erected. A series of en-

thusiastic meetings took place towards the end of July. At one of them, on the 28th, a dissenter from the patriotic expressions of Mr. Patrick Rafferty of the Thirty-Third Regiment was seized by the crowd and thrown into the Frog Pond. The largest meeting of all occurred on August 27. "On no occasion which the war has given rise to," said the "Advertiser," "has the expression of the people been so general and so marked by patriotic fervor as in the grand celebration of yesterday. Business was universally suspended by common consent, and the suggestion for a procession and mass meeting in aid of the city recruitment met with a hearty response. . . . The affair was essentially popular; men in citizens' dress and distinguished only by the badges of their respective callings, and the colors and mottoes which symbolize the common cause, united in the long procession, and listened to the eloquent appeals from the various stands on the Common. . . . Early in the afternoon the various associations proposing to join in the procession began to assemble on the Common near Park Street. . . . The various civic and military organizations entered the Common by the West Street gate and were at once conducted into line by the Marshals. The procession was formed and paraded through the city in accordance with the well-arranged programme." There were stirring addresses from the three stands on the Common by Governor Andrew, Edward Everett, Robert C. Winthrop, and others, including a Kentucky general and a California Senator.

If the assembling and dispatching of troops to the South provoked enthusiasm, the spirit in which they were welcomed home again may well be imagined. The receptions to returning regiments



began very early in the war, for the first enlistments were for the briefest of periods. The Third and Fourth Regiments were back in Boston on July 23, 1861; the Fifth and Sixth returned on July 30 and August 1 respectively. Of course they were marched to the Common, reviewed and cheered by the excited crowd. But before the mustering-out — followed in many cases by immediate reënlistment — the men were fed at tables on the Beacon Street Mall. After the “bountiful collation” mentioned in the “Advertiser” of August 2, 1861, describing the reception of the Sixth Regiment, it is said that “the soldiers strolled about the Common, talking with friends and acquaintances. Those who were so unfortunate as not to have any, soon succeeded in making both out of the crowd who were anxious to hear all the news that was to be heard.” These earliest regiments returned far less impaired than those which followed them. The thinned ranks, the torn and blood-stained flags soon began to make their piteous appeal on the Common. It is easy to picture it all, and remembering those who looked in vain for the unreturning, to fill in many details of personal tragedy.

These spectacles were presented over and over again, even until the summer and autumn of 1865. A typical reception — and one shall speak for many — is described in the “Advertiser” of Thursday, June 11, 1863, telling of the return of the Forty-Fourth on the preceding day. The regiment was marched to the Common, where a great crowd, especially on the Charles Street Mall, was gathered to greet it. There were military salutes and an exchange of speeches between the Mayor and Colonel Lee. “The guns were then stacked, and the men broke ranks. At this moment the ladies could restrain



their feelings no longer. Propriety gave way to nature, and they rushed with open arms upon lovers, brothers, husbands, sons — and perhaps cousins — a female avalanche of streaming ribands and fluttering silks. The brave fellows stood the shock like men. They deployed as skirmishers and attempted to foil the attacking party with their own weapons, but were presently captured and led, willing prisoners, to the refreshment-tables, where a tempting array of flowers and edibles was presented. The male relatives presently came in for their share of the greeting. After an hour or so spent in social conversation, in affectionate questions and affectionate answers, the men were again brought into line and went through with a dress-parade, to the great satisfaction of the spectators. The regiment was then dismissed and the men will have a furlough till Monday, when they will probably go to Readville and be mustered out of the service.”

In addition to all these occasions involving an element of strong personal feeling, there were observances of great events in the progress of the war. On April 11, 1862, a few days after the battle of Shiloh, a salute of one hundred guns was fired on the Common in honor of recent victories. On July 8, 1863, the news from Gettysburg and Vicksburg gave the excuse for a national salute of thirty-five guns. The Emancipation Proclamation was celebrated by a salute of a hundred guns. When the sailors from the Russian war vessels *Vitiaz* and *Oслиaba* visited Boston Common on June 8, 1864, their reception, the collation, the greeting of the Latin and High School boys, all gave expression to a national response to the friendliness of the great northern power. The news of the fall of Rich-

mond on April 3, 1865, was celebrated by a salute on the Common; and then to Boston, as to all the North, came the sudden turning from joy to sorrow. The minute guns on the day of Lincoln's funeral, April 19, were as unlike those of a fortnight before as the tolling can be unlike the pealing of bells. In the afternoon the citizens of the six northern wards of the city met on the Common. Again there were stands for speakers, but the words were the words of mourning. Again there was music, but the bands were playing dirges. Here, as everywhere else, the national grief was touched with that strange personal quality always inseparable from the influence of Lincoln.

With the transfer of the battle-flags of Massachusetts regiments to the keeping of the Commonwealth, on December 22, 1865, when the military representative of the State established his headquarters for their reception on the Park Street Mall, the specific war-time uses of the Common may be said to have come to an end. In no period of all its history have four successive years seen it so vitally bound up with the inmost life of the community. The bas-reliefs at the foot of Martin Milmore's Army and Navy Monument, erected on Flag-Staff Hill in 1877, tell something of the great events which these pages have sought to recall; and the noble words of President Eliot's inscription pass the meaning of them on to future generations.

There were few events in the remaining years of the nineteenth century which call for extended chronicle. In the centennial year, 1876, the celebration of the Fourth of July thronged the malls with booths, the Common itself with multitudes of holiday-makers. It was estimated that between fifty and a hundred thousand persons

crowded it at night to see a display of fireworks which was to have been unusually splendid, but because of a high wind proved a disappointment. The loss of what might have been was, however, a slight affair compared with the loss of so beloved a possession as the Great Elm. On February 15, 1876, this ancient tree, already badly mutilated by storms of 1860 and 1869, fell before a high wind. The newspapers of the succeeding days are fairly humid with the tears of local poets. A glory had indeed departed from Israel. The measurements of the tree by the City Engineer in 1855 showed its height to be seventy-two feet, six inches; its girth one foot above the ground, twenty-two feet, six inches; the average diameter of its spread where the branches were broadest, one hundred and one feet. Whether the true scion of the Old Elm is now growing in its place, or — as there is good reason to believe — at a point near by and unmarked, the making of such another tree is a work for the centuries to accomplish.

The loss of the Old Elm may have served a good purpose in making the community more tenacious of all its other possessions in the Common. Salvations from one threatened encroachment after another have occupied many Bostonians for a generation past. A Western observer looks reverently upon it as “a civic ornament for which people have fought, bled, and written letters to the ‘Evening Transcript.’” As early as 1869 the city gave its permission for the erection of a building for a great musical festival; but the popular feeling against such an employment of land on the Common was so strong that the famous “Peace Jubilee” took place elsewhere. After the Boston fire of 1872, when merchants strewed the Common with the rescued contents of their warehouses, the



building of temporary stores was authorized. It was not found practicable or necessary to take advantage of the permission, though on this occasion local sentiment would probably have acquiesced. Not so in 1873, when the demand for more horse-car tracks on Tremont Street led to the removal of the Common fence: the next year it was restored. Again, in 1877, the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanics' Association was warmly supported in its appeal for the right to put up a temporary exhibition building on the parade-ground. But the project was quite as warmly opposed, and those who opposed it, in public hearings, remonstrances, spoken and written, won the day. Whenever the Common cried out to be saved, there was an army ready to save it.

As the century drew to a close the conduct of a modern city raised new problems. With a large business population sleeping out of town and carried by electric cars to the high office-buildings rising on every hand, the conditions of street-traffic, especially on Tremont Street, became unbearable. Various solutions of the difficulty were proposed — the widening of Tremont Street, the extension of surface cars across the Common in a line with Columbus Avenue, or through an open trench with overhead bridges for pedestrians. "Save the Common" again became a slogan — and the form of salvation finally adopted, as the plan involving least of actual loss, was the building of the present Subway, begun in 1895. The chief loss of outward beauty lay in supplanting the venerable trees along Tremont Street with the broken row of Subway stations. But the problem was, to face the future without doing more than the inevitable violence to the past.



One violence there was, of a rather gruesome sort. When the Boylston Street Mall was opened in 1836 it covered a number of tombs and graves in the Common Burial-Ground. In the excavation for the Subway these were necessarily disturbed. The care of the human fragments which came to light was entrusted to Dr. Samuel A. Green, who estimated that the bones brought together and decently reinterred represented more than nine hundred persons. Among them — as if justice were always to have its poetic vindication — must have been the progenitors of an owner of one of the Boylston Street tombs who violently resisted the improvements of 1836. He is said to have told the Mayor that “he would stand at the door of his tomb with a drawn sword before it should be closed, or the bones of his ancestors removed!” Persuaded finally to accept in exchange one of the new tombs along the walk from Park Square to West Street, he replied to the Mayor’s suggestion that a sexton be engaged to make the solemn transfer: “Mr. Mayor, you don’t suppose I’m going to have my new tomb dirtied up with those old bones! No, close up the old one and let ’em be!”

New tombs and old bones — the moralist could draw his parallels without number from these starting-points. But that attempt at draughtsmanship shall not be undertaken here. Between 1800 and 1900 the old Common gave place entirely to the new. The essentials were still there when the nineteenth century ended, and in general they had gained much from the passage of time and from pious care. With this gain there was also transmitted to the twentieth century a rich store of memories and associations making the Common dearer than ever to its inheritors.

## IV

### THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

**T**HE fourth century in which Boston Common has been Boston Common is still so fractional a thing that a few pages will hold all that needs to be said about it. One fact may be stated without reservation. It was a fortunate thing that Boston in the year 1900 had as one of its most conspicuous citizens Dr. Edward Everett Hale. The town was correspondingly fortunate to have Judge Samuel Sewall in the year 1700. The two men had many points of obvious unlikeness; but they were alike in standing each as a vigorous and individual representative of his own day. We have seen with what results Judge Sewall interested himself in welcoming the eighteenth century on Boston Common. It was characteristic of Dr. Hale not only to recall the page of Sewall's diary for January 1, 1701, but also to translate its suggestion into the terms of modern life. The resulting celebration of the entrance of the present century stands by itself in the annals of the Common.

At a quarter before the midnight hour of December 31, 1900, there were gathered on the balcony of the State House, lighted by swinging lanterns, nearly two hundred singers from the Handel and Haydn and the Cecilia Societies, four cornet-players,—the nearest available approach to the trumpeters of Sewall's time,—Governor Crane, Dr. Hale, and a few others. The trumpeters sounded "tattoo" or "taps"—the "Transcript" and Dr. Hale's notes written the next day differ on this point—and the great assembly,

crowding the State House yard and the streets, and stretching far off into the Common, sang a stanza of Old Hundred, "Be Thou, O God, exalted high." Selections from the Ninetieth Psalm — "A thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night," "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" — these and other verses were then read by Dr. Hale. "People were still as death," he wrote the next day. "The balcony and people made a good sounding-board. My voice was all right, and I read very slowly. I have since seen people who were nearly as far away as Winter Street who heard me. [I have been asked a hundred times if I used a megaphone. But here is simply an illustration of the power of the human voice if the listeners will keep still.]" On this reading followed the singing of Sewall's Hymn, written two centuries before. The invocation of its second line, "Tame Thou the rigor of our clime," seemed to be answered in what the "Transcript" called the "unseasonable but opportune warmth of the night." Then the trumpeters again — and silence till the King's Chapel bell began to strike the midnight hour, so slowly that a blast on the trumpets could be blown between the strokes. The new century was here — welcomed also from every part of the city with bells and whistles. But the ceremony on Beacon Hill lasted a few minutes longer while all the people, from Governor to newsboys, joined in saying the Lord's Prayer, singing "America," and listening in silence to the final words of Dr. Hale, "God bless our city, our State, and our country." The trumpets then sounded the reveille and the people quietly dispersed to their homes. "I do not think they thought of it as a religious service

when they came," said Dr. Hale, "but they all did when they went away." The night endures in memory as something impressively serious, democratic, and unifying in its appeal both to the historic and to the civic sense.

Thus begun, the new century has dealt with Boston Common much as it is dealing with everything else in the world. There has been no sudden turning of a corner, no opening of new vistas from a hilltop laboriously gained. The life of the community moves, as it has always moved, across the familiar paths and open spaces. The Common is still a place of recreation for young and old. The summer and winter sports exercise all their ancient spell. Up and down the well-trod walks the pursuit of business and of pleasure, and of the two made one, is steadily continued. The benches accommodate the unwillingly and the willingly unemployed, the representatives of a great leisure class, in ever-increasing numbers. Pigeons and squirrels learn day by day that the people of Boston go armed with nuts and biscuit, and not with implements of destruction. For those who would feed the mind and spirit with a varied dietary, there are the Sunday afternoon orators, offering sustenance in every cause, social, political, religious. The doctrines may be new, but the town itself is hardly older than the use of the Common for the free expression of current opinions.

One new thing has come to the Common in the final years of the first decade of this century. The new thing can hardly be called a sense of permanence, for that has long existed; but there has come a definite and effective confirmation of this sense. There died in September, 1908, a citizen of Boston, Mr. George F. Parkman, who



had lived for many years in a house overlooking the Common. In a codicil to his will, disposing of an ample fortune, he bequeathed to the City of Boston a fund, found to exceed five million dollars, "the income of which is to be applied to the maintenance and improvement of the Common and the Parks now existing." In the body of the will it is seen that the benefactor planned his bequest "to the City of Boston in the hope and expectation that the Boston Common shall never be diverted from its present use as a public park for the benefit and enjoyment of its citizens." The past of the Common is secure: it has become a fixed possession of local history and sentiment. Now it appears that the future is also secure.

What will this future hold? Surely nothing more noteworthy in the field of suggestive contrast than the two facts with which this brief historical record begins and ends. In 1634 every householder of the town was taxed six shillings and upwards to raise thirty pounds, one hundred and fifty dollars, for the purchase of Boston Common. In 1908 one citizen left five million dollars, out of the income of which it is to be maintained.

## POSTSCRIPT, 1921

THE year in which a young century attains its majority affords a terminus for such a book as this far more appropriate than any such indistinguishable date as 1910. The pages immediately preceding these dealt with "The Twentieth Century" merely in its infancy. From childhood the century has now passed to manhood, and the transition has been accomplished under conditions for which no precedent exists. Between 1910 and 1921 the years have been packed, for all the world, with events material and spiritual, with readjustments and realizations, of a scope which a hundred ordinary years could hardly compass. All these have had their visible expression on Boston Common, never before so manifestly a mirror of the life of Boston itself, of the country, even of the world.

In one particular the Common has undergone changes of outward aspect which would have come about just as surely if there had been no such thing as a World War. The diligent expenditure of the income from the Parkman Fund has bent some of the paths from their ancient courses; has cut new ones, for purposes not always clear; has provided them, new and old, with a lavish, granolithic smoothness and dryness; has enriched the soil in grassy places and applied scientific surgery and other attentions to the trees; has erected a granite temple of music for the uses of a band-stand; and withal has made the Common a scene of industry from which the fruits of restfulness may be expected to grow for future generations.

The latest activity of picks, shovels, and carts has been one of the most beneficent — the levelling of the bare tract near Charles Street, long devoted to baseball and other games.<sup>1</sup> This contribution to the practical enjoyment of the Common by the most energetic younger citizens of Boston may appear to leave little remaining undone, but the civic imagination is fertile, and only a rash prophet would predict the changes that could not possibly be chronicled in a further addition to these pages ten years hence. Ten years ago nobody could have foretold that in 1920 the portentous congestion of vehicle traffic on Boylston and Tremont Streets would lead to the substantial widening of these streets by the paring-away of the footpaths that edge the Common, and this without serious opposition from any portion of the public.

The recent physical changes thus briefly summarized are as permanent as any such changes can be. While they have been in the making, many another change has come and gone with the coming and going of the World War. From the time the United States formally joined the Allied Powers until our soldiers and sailors were reabsorbed into the civilian population, the Common presented many scenes of extraordinary significance.

At least one older man of affairs in Boston was wont to express his scepticism on any debatable point by exclaiming, "I'll believe that when I see buffaloes on the Common." Dear he might have seen there in years gone by. Before the war a camel, which imparted a flavor of true orientalism to a "sumptuous production" in a Boston

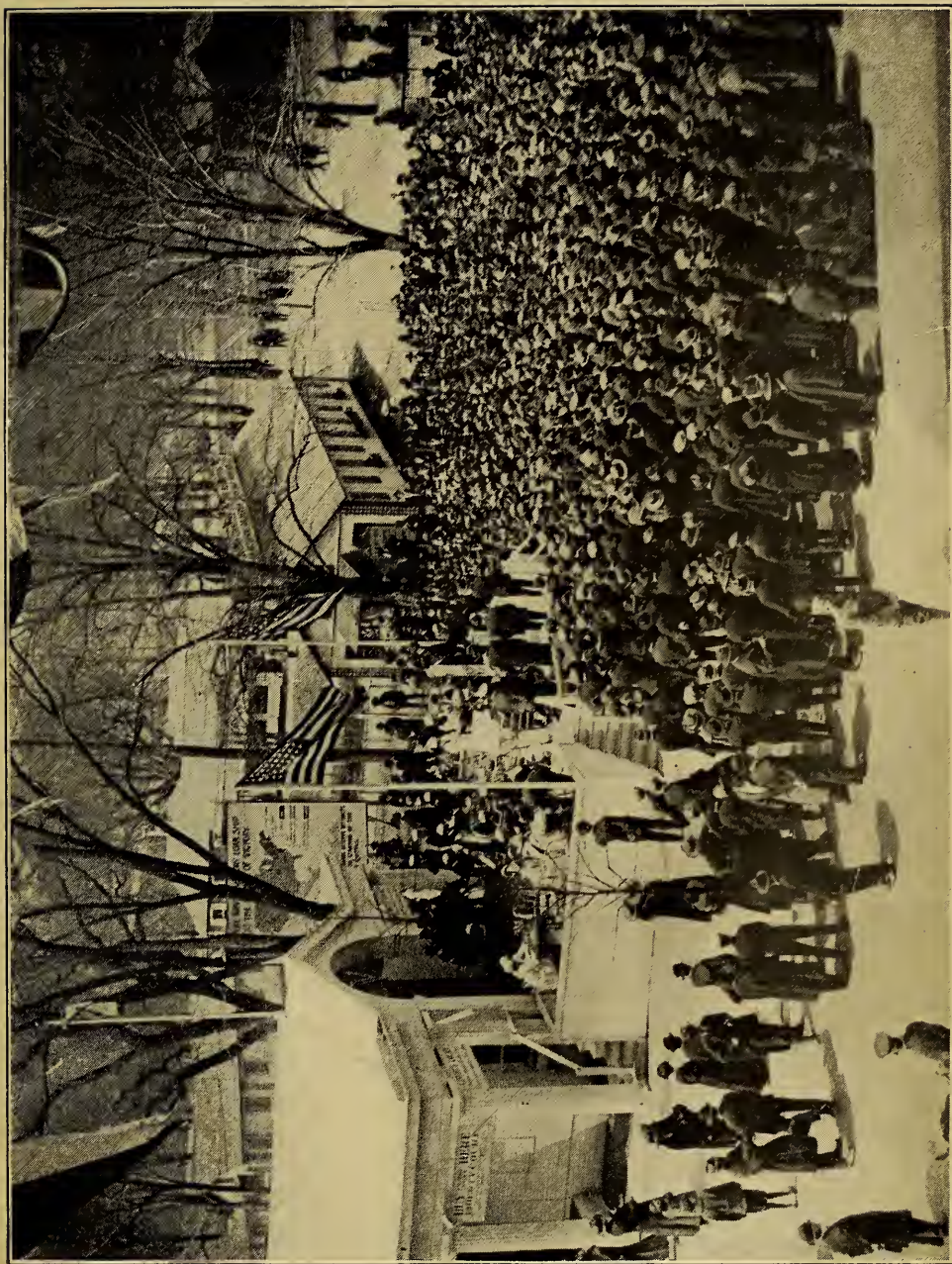
<sup>1</sup> Even as this book passes through the press, a still later activity is in progress: the cobbled bottom of the Frog Pond gives place to concrete.

theatre, might have been observed enjoying his daily exercise along the Charles Street Mall. But if the buffaloes have not yet appeared, the Bostonian who conjured with their absence had only to look out of his office windows during one of the "drives" of the war period to see that even more exotic animal, the elephant, marched to and fro in the Common for the speedier conversion of American patriotism into cash.

The Common — particularly that corner of it which fronts Tremont Street in the neighborhood of Park Street — presented many spectacles quite as strange as elephants in 1917 and the two years that immediately followed. One of these was afforded by the Boston headquarters of a British and Canadian Recruiting Mission — with friendly "kilties" received as warmly by the local public as the "red-coats" of the eighteenth century were detested. The recruiting stations for the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps of the United States were but the modern equivalents of the recruiting tents used on the Common during the Civil War. Without any such precedent were the huts of the Y. M. C. A., the Knights of Columbus, Salvation Army, and the American Red Cross. The Army and Navy Canteen, in which departing and returning soldiers and sailors enjoyed the ministrations of a devoted band of local "war workers," the City of Boston Employment Bureau, the War Camp Community Service, the Boston War Work Council, the United States Interdepartmental Social Hygiene Board, the War Service Committee — each of these made its own contribution on the Common to the welfare of the young men in khaki and blue. There was also the "Liberty Cottage," a small building opposite West Street, the



1876



BUYING LIBERTY BONDS AT "LIBERTY COURT" (FORMERLY "COTTAGE")



busy nucleus for the activities of the Mayor's Reception Committee for Returning Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines, of Liberty Loan and Red Cross drives. From its portico impassioned bond salesmen poured forth their oratory, professional and amateur actors, actresses, and singers, with and without megaphones, beguiled the passers-by; and when the war was over, such scenes as the bestowal of the Congressional Medal of Honor on Lieutenant-Colonel Wittlesey of the Lost Battalion were here enacted.

Near the "down-town" end of the path leading from the West Street crossing to Park Street stood a group of five little buildings bearing the general name of "Food Administration Cottages." Planned by the Food Administration of Massachusetts, they were erected and maintained, under the following names, by the organizations and for the purposes named in connection with each: Number 1, Food Facts Cottage, by the Women's City Club, to distribute literature and information about food; Number 2, Child Welfare Cottage, by the Boston Public Safety Committee and the Boston Food Conservation Committee, to give information and instruction about Child Welfare; Number 3, Administration Cottage, by the Public Safety Committee of Massachusetts, for lectures, meetings, and exhibitions for the State food work; Number 4, Civic Federation Cottage, by the New England Branch of the National Civic Federation, for daily demonstrations in cooking, canning, and drying; Number 5, Red Cross Cottage, by the Metropolitan Chapter of the American Red Cross, to exhibit its work and obtain memberships in the Red Cross organization. A porch on the Administration Cottage was built and maintained by the Women's Municipal



League, for the display of food exhibits. In the same enclosure with all these buildings were war gardens, maintained and cultivated by the War Service Committee of the Women's City Club and the Girl Scouts, and a hen-house and yard, built and maintained by the Massachusetts State Agricultural College, for giving all possible information on the care of poultry. In this enclosure also patriotic moving pictures and community singing night after night brought together a large number of persons, to excellent purpose.

On the work done in each of these cottages, and at all the other little structures which law and sentiment would have excluded from the precincts of the Common at any other time, whole chapters might be written. Little more than an imperfect catalogue of manifold activities can be given here, but it will not have been given in vain if it causes the reader to apprehend the diversity of "groups" and interests represented on the Common, and typifying the participation of the whole American public in the conduct of the war. To the scenes these activities provided should be added at least a mention of such other spectacles as an incipient riot provoked by a man who failed to remove his hat during the playing of the Marseillaise; a country cattle sale, to raise funds for buying seeds for the Food Conservation campaign; the exhibition of a captured German field-gun, and anti-aircraft gun, guarded day and night by soldiers tented near by, and of a captive balloon and searchlights provided by the United States Government to forward Liberty Loan subscriptions.

The mere enumeration of some of these varied scenes will serve the present purpose, which is to recall the great and intensely practical uses to which the Common was put during the years when City,



State, and Nation were calling upon every man, woman, and child for the best they had to give to the imperilled cause of civilization. The unsubstantial pageant has faded and left not a rack behind — unless it be in the signs that remind one of the vanished recruiting booths: “Keep off the Grass: if you want to roam, join the Navy.”

Great these uses of the Common were, but not strange. They afford the perfectly fitting climax of the story of this bit of Boston territory, not only as the twentieth century passes from youth into manhood, but as Boston itself approaches the completion of its third century of existence. Never before in all its nearly three hundred years has the town or city so manifestly needed a universal meeting-place for its citizens of all degrees as through the time when America joined whole-heartedly in the effort of the world to save itself from ruin. No single building, no public square, could have met the mighty need. The Common was there to meet it, and the people of Boston, employing all their talents of organization and coöperation, seized upon it as their theatre of action. The stage-settings have been removed; the actors have gone their several ways; but the war-time Common has become a treasure of local and national memory which will endure.

THE END



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